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EDITORIAL

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This issue brings together a number of articles on different aspects of television. Patricia Zimmerman describes the obstacles which US television networks present to independent documentary producers and argues for a restructuring of the network system. In his discussion of the television production of David Hare's 'film for television' *Dreams of Leaving*, John Caughie elaborates a notion of art television as a working ideology within television and criticism. He sees it as a way of opening out some of the received orthodoxies of institutional and critical discourses about television. Most serious critical work on television has been devoted to the more popular programmes such as news, sport, the series and the serial (the two latter the subject of other articles in this issue). However, such studies sometimes ignore the fact that forms are privileged by both producers *and* viewers in terms of credibility and prestige, witness the substantial viewing figures for opera on TV. Caughie argues that programmes such as *Dreams of Leaving*, which though not progressive in themselves, are so privileged within dominant discourses, and that progressive discourses have to take this hierarchy seriously if they wish to argue for different priorities and different forms.

From May 1982, *Screen* and *Screen Education* will join to form one single, new magazine to be published as a bi-monthly and to be called *Screen*. There are many reasons for this change, including the current recession which has forced SEFT to reconsider its

publication strategy. While it is true that both *Screen* and *Screen Education* had developed distinct policies and practices and were beginning to increase their sales and subscriptions, this change is to be welcomed. Both magazines were shaped by a commitment to educational and theoretical work in relation to cinema and television which required them to be open to the possibility of innovation. A newly elected editorial board is working on issues which will build on *Screen* and *Screen Education*'s important critical and theoretical work.

The appearance of a cumulative index, vols 12-22, 1971-81, points to the fact that we have been in the business of radical writing on film, television and (to a lesser extent) education, for ten years. *Screen* has become 'respected', though fortunately still able to infuriate some members of the film criticism establishment, such as the *New Statesman* and *Times Education Supplements*. The bi-monthly format will enable *Screen* to challenge critical orthodoxy more directly, through more frequent reviews and journalistic articles.

This is also the last issue of *Screen* which I shall be editing. After nearly four years as editor it is time to let others shape the magazine more closely. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing *Screen* Board for all they have contributed to the production of the magazine.

MARK NASH

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JOHN CAUGHIE

RHETORIC, PLEASURE AND 'ART TELEVISION' - DREAMS OF LEAVING

It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theatre, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing) cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire.

Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'¹

1 Laura Mulvey,
'Visual Pleasure
and Narrative
Cinema', *Screen*,
vol 16, no 3, p 17.

IF IT IS the possibility of varying and exposing the look which makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from strip-tease, theatre, and shows, what is it that makes it quite different from television? More precisely, is the difference between cinema and television an essential difference, built into the mechanics as it might be with the difference between cinema and theatre, or is it simply one of potential, cinema and television sharing the essential mechanics (editing, narrative, changes of distance, the varying of the look) but exploiting them differently? Is the question of the pleasure of the look pertinent to television as it is to cinema, or is it, in relation to questions of flow, institution and audience, merely impertinent and formalist? What accounts for the difference in the expectation of pleasure when we go to the cinema and when we switch on the box?

Questions of visual and narrative pleasure have been central in recent theoretical writing on film. Much of this writing has been

psychoanalytic in its focus and vocabulary, seeking an explanation for the pleasure of the look in terms of fetishism, voyeurism, narcissism and subjectivity, but even where theory has resisted, or simply not adopted, the language of psychoanalysis, certain assumptions have been the same: that the question of the relationship between spectator and screen is a crucial issue, not simply for theory but also for exhibition practices, and that pleasure is a basic term in that relationship. Writing on television, on the other hand, has adopted a much more general vocabulary of pleasure, and it seems that questions of the specific mechanisms of television, of its mode of address and its different pleasures, can still be asked with the force of some originality. In that sense, this piece is intended to be exploratory. Its focus is narrow, generalising in a particular area of television fiction on the basis of a single instance; and it does not attempt to institute a new vocabulary of analysis for television, but rather to explore the specificity of its object within the existing terms developed to account for narrative cinema. At the same time, the intention is not simply to hold television up against the template of film theory; rather, I would like the action of the piece to be a kind of field reverse-field: looking at television drama from the point of view of some of the terms of film theory, and looking at the terms, questioning their universality, from the point of view of television drama.

Now, I have some hesitations about this, and it may well evoke the healthy suspicion that this is nothing more than an attempt to win television back for the formalism and theoreticism which is laid at the door of film theory. Writing about television has insisted on placing programme practices within institutional relations and ideologies, and has challenged the importance of the individual television text by insisting on the primacy of flow. Within that context a piece on rhetoric, pleasure and 'art television' may seem dangerously regressive. But while I absolutely agree that questions of form on television (or anywhere else) must always be brought back to questions of institution, audience and conditions of viewing, at the same time it seems to me that we have to begin to specify the particular ways in which individual programmes work, how they produce their pleasures and address their viewers; and this may involve clearing some space around the basic figures of television's rhetoric. It is not that theory can be developed simply by abstracting formal strategies from their conditions of existence, but rather that priorities may have to be shifted for a moment to allow the strategies to be identified: we need to know how the rhetoric works, and while that understand-

ing will have to be read back into an understanding of television as institutional discourse, it cannot simply be read out of it. The trick is to show how the one set of questions is intricated with the other set, rather than to give one a fixed priority over the other.

Existing discussions of the pleasures which television offers have tended to concentrate around, on the one hand, notions of the extension of experience, and, on the other, notions of recognition, confirmation and validation of experience. Within the functioning of television both notions deserve attention, and the second in particular has the capacity to rescue forms of popular television from the assumption of the purely passive and 'escapist' pleasures to which a number of critical and theoretical discourses consign them. But there is a high level of generality in the notions, and while the insistence on experience usefully poses a social spectator who comes to television as the subject of other practices rather than as the empty, helpless subject which some theoretical work seems to pose, the level of generality allows the spectator to emerge as a subject, in relation to television, of an amorphous flow and of a monolithic pleasure spread across television as a whole. What this misses is that crucial and specific plurality of television which institutes a play of differential pleasures, each addressing its spectators in different ways as different subjects. What I want to do in this article is to try to identify one of those modes of address, rather than to try to define a unified, enveloping, singular Pleasure of Television. It's a question of trying to make precise some of the ways in which television produces (or doesn't produce) specific pleasures, rather than of assuming an already existing reservoir of pleasure (of viewing, of recognition, of validation) which is somehow natural to spectators and which television simply taps.

I propose to use *Dreams of Leaving* as an instance of what I am calling (for better or worse) 'art television', and what television discourses tend to call 'serious drama'. The choice of 'art television' is slightly polemical, and I will come back to it at the end: briefly, though, it's because I think that there is a danger that a rigid concentration on popular forms (*Dallas*, *Coronation Street*) is always going to be marginalised by other critical discourses, and, more seriously, by the dominant institutional discourses. As a point of strategy, it seems important to me to engage with those discourses and to develop serious theoretical debates around the areas which television itself takes seriously. I don't propose to offer a detailed and exhaustive sequential analysis

- 2 The scripts of both *Dreams of Leaving* and *Licking Hitler* are published in Faber Paperback, 1980 and 1978 respectively.

of *Dreams of Leaving*, but rather to expose it to some of the questions which have been important in the analysis of films, and to use it as the basis for what generalisations seem possible and useful.

Dreams of Leaving

Dreams of Leaving was written and directed by David Hare, photographed by Mike Williams, and produced by David Rose for the BBC Regional Drama Unit at Pebble Mill, Birmingham. It was transmitted, billed as a 'film for television', in the BBC 1 'Play for Today' slot in January 1980, and subsequently repeated. Hare's earlier 'film for television', *Licking Hitler*, had won the BAFTA award for Best Television Play of 1978, a fact which was given some emphasis in *Radio Times* publicity for *Dreams of Leaving*. The female lead in both *Licking Hitler* and *Dreams of Leaving* was played by the same actress, Kate Nelligan.

The published script of the 'film for television' gives the following book jacket description:²

In the early 'seventies a young man comes to London to make his name in journalism and to savour the opportunities, personal, cultural, sexual, the metropolis has to offer. He meets a girl who appears to embody them all, who moves with easy assurance through the worlds of pop, public relations, art galleries, photography and modern dance, with a promiscuity whose reflection in her personal life becomes inescapable. David Hare follows the award-winning Licking Hitler with a film for television which explores with sometimes painful insight the human cost of a modern way of life.

In a preview article by Michael Billington in *Radio Times*, Hare is quoted as saying:

This film is an attempt to put something serious about sex on television. There's a lot of smut on television but hardly anything about the real variety of people's sexuality. I wanted to write something which a mass audience would recognise as a situation in which they'd been. And to deal with the impact of sex on people's lives.

Billington stresses Hare's insistence on truth: William's flat is one in which Hare himself once lived, the newspaper office is indeed a newspaper office (and Hare asked them not to empty

the waste bins), and Kate Nelligan as Caroline wears clothes belonging to girls Hare knows: "It may not say anything," says Hare, "but it's true".

The film/play was widely reviewed (the *Daily Mail* and *Express*, as well as the *Guardian*, *The Times*, and the *Observer*), but critical opinion was fairly luke-warm, ranging from the tentative:

One could not escape the feeling that Dreams of Leaving might have been designed by Mr Hare as an exercise for his own benefit, the presence of an audience being almost incidental — but few of the audience will have remained entirely unmoved.

Jennifer Lovelace, *The Listener*

—to the hostile:

William and Caroline are merely the sort of tiresome poseurs whom one avoids at parties.

Mervyn Jones, *The Listener*

Michael Ratcliffe, writing in *The Times*, regretted the epilogue which 'blunted the impact' of the asylum scene; Peter Fiddick (*Guardian*) felt the same ('a cop-out rather than a culmination'), and, while finding the film 'always watchable', suspected that Caroline was 'an enigma who is hiding a vacuum'. Clive James, in *The Observer*, used the film/play for his own brand of 'good copy':

A gutter-press journalist in love with Caroline, a cock-teasing coke-fiend who was always almost going to bed with him. None of it was believable, but all of it was classily filmed, and Kate Nelligan once again succeeded in her self-imposed task of looking even more impossibly beautiful than she did last time.

All reviews mentioned Kate Nelligan's performance, many of them in terms of its sexuality.

Despite the relative lack of critical enthusiasm, my impression is that the film has been 'taken up' (and this article is, willy-nilly, a part of that 'taking up') by recent thinking, teaching and writing about television which is looking for a break in the dominance of 'naturalism' in television drama. In that context, it is interesting that none of the reviews mark out the film as being in some way different, set apart from the main-stream of 'Plays for Today'. Some mention is made of Mike Williams' photography, but nothing is made of the fact that the film is a film. In a sense, it is this absence of a critical awareness of the difference and specificity of

film which gives me the licence to consider the film in the context of the single play for television: it occupies a play slot, it takes its significance from its relationship to other plays, it is, if you like, an intervention into television drama rather than into film. At the same time, I can't avoid the fact that the specificity of its visual style has a great deal to do with the fact that it is a play on film.

Authorship

The prestige given to the writer and his script seems to me to be the central determinant of television drama, with repercussions in the institutional standing of drama, in its visual style, and in the form of its pleasure. For visual style, the comparison between the histories of cinema and television seems almost too neat: cinema spends the first thirty years of its existence with vision and no speech, and develops a highly elaborated visual rhetoric which survives the arrival of sound, determines the relation of image to speech, and carries with it a respect for visual technique, *mise en scène*, and director; broadcasting spends the first thirty years of its existence with speech and no vision, and develops a respect for the spoken word, the script, and the writer. Not only does television drama develop out of radio drama, it also develops with a strong respect for theatre as its most culturally prestigious cognate form. This not only inflects the working ideologies and discourses of television, but it also materially affects the recruitment of actors (and the status which is given to theatrical acting), and the recruitment of writers: television looks to the theatre to provide its best 'talents', and both writers and directors (and to a much lesser extent, directors) move easily between theatre and television, carrying prestige from theatre to television, and popularity from television to theatre.

This repeats a point which I elaborated in an earlier article on documentary drama.³ I argued that the debilitating effect of the status given to the writer is the development of a purely instrumental view of television technology in which the writer is invited simply to use the medium as a neutral relay through which to transmit his thoughts and words to a wider audience than he could reach in the theatre. This exploitation of television for its mass audience is a common-place among the explanations and justifications (and excuses) which theatre writers offer for their television work; it is also supported by a number of the professional discourses within television which urge the writer to leave the technology to the competence of the experts, and just get on

3 John Caughie, 'Progressive Television and Documentary Drama', *Screen* vol 21, no 3, 1980, pp 16-19.

with the writing. Such a division of labour between television professionals (directors, producers) and creative and expressive artists (writers) institutes the traditional division between form and content which tends always to privilege content (thought and feeling) over form (the technique, the 'tricks of the trade'). The orthodoxy that television is a 'writer's medium' tends to assume a hierarchy in which *mise en scène* fulfils a service role in relation to script, rather than functioning as that fully elaborated discourse of cinema on which our position as spectators and our pleasure depend. The need to question that orthodoxy recalls Truffaut's 1954 invective against the French cinema's *Tradition de la Qualité* in which the director was there simply to implement the writer-adaptor's script. Ultimately, it is to the privilege given to writer and script rather than to the essentialisms of scale and scanned image that we should look for the explanation of television's relative lack of visual pleasure.

David Hare fits into this in a complicated way. On the one hand, his reputation was first established within theatre, and it is to the theatre that he seems to pay his primary allegiance: his standing as a writer precedes any standing which he may have as a television film-maker. But, on the other hand, Hare writes *and directs* his own films, thus giving himself a more continuous control over the process, and breaking down the division between professional expert and artist. Given this control, Hare, as a film-maker, produces a deliberate and relatively elaborate *mise en scène*, and, even more surprisingly for television, his films work with a fairly tight verbal economy. At the formal level, they have a visual interest and consistency which is unusual on British television: they are, indeed, filmic rather than literary or theatrical, and in that sense, Hare can be compared to those cinematic *auteurs* whose work was celebrated by *Cahiers* over the mere confections of the *litterateurs*.

But what is at stake in authorship is not simply the question of creative, thematic or stylistic control; cinematic theories of authorship also involve notions of address and recognition, and, crucially, of the place which the author occupies in the relation between text and reader. The cinephile's pleasure and fascination is persistently in the recognition of the *auteur*; an *auteur* who, in more sophisticated versions of authorship, may be abstracted as a contradiction which escapes control and censorship, or as an unconscious which breaks into the text in the gap between intention and effect, between speech and *mise en scène*. For the cinephile the loss of institutional control (the institution of cinema,

the institution of verbal language, or of the script) in the face of the obsession of the author is a source of delight: the *auteur* uncovered. Much of this lies in the escape of visual discourse, the *mise en scène*, from the control of prepared language, the script. Now for television, the 'writer's medium' which privileges the script, the tension between visual and verbal becomes unequal, the visual supports rather than subverts the verbal, and discourse is brought under control. Themes and obsessions are written into the script to be implemented by the *mise en scène*, rather than lurking, repressed, in the gaps and contradictions of the text, tempting the discoveries of the equally obsessional analyst. Consistencies are presented complete, as a result of a working out in thought rather than as the result of the unconscious breaking through.

Thinking of Hare and *Dreams of Leaving*, it is clearly interesting that he places the same actress at the centre of the enigma in both this narrative and in *Licking Hitler*. The film/play takes on some of the fascination of an obsessive reworking, with Hare's desire to penetrate the secret of the sexuality of this woman (this actress) held out as a point of sadistic involvement for the male spectator. And yet, while we may read that obsession into the text, it is difficult to read it out of it. The traces of the author's desire are covered over in language, written out by being written about, controlled in thought and writing. Nothing escapes. Absent from the text, the obsessional traces slip through only in the *Radio Times* revelation that William's flat was indeed David Hare's flat and Caroline's clothes are indeed the clothes of David Hare's girl friends.

This is dangerous ground, and can easily fall away into an argument for subjectivism and irrationality, a simple validation of the unconscious over the conscious. Clearly, there is strength in television's argument which puts a value on the conscious inventiveness, imagination and intelligence of the writer who can continually come at the world from a new and sometimes unexpected angle. Clearly, also, cinephilia is a perverse pleasure. Concern with television is a political necessity, and it cannot simply be validated in terms of the fantasy life of its viewers. At the same time, an understanding of the specific nature of the forms of pleasure which television offers and refuses is politically crucial in understanding the kinds of relationships we are offered to its representations. What I am trying to get at here is not so much the 'disappointment' which the cinephile experiences with

television, as a partial explanation of why it is that even those of us who are genuinely concerned with television seem to have less at stake, less invested, than in cinema's fictions: is there such a thing as 'telephilia' which is not simply a bad habit? Quite differently from considerations of cinema, discussions of television seem to take place between people who can see the seduction, *but have not been seduced*.

While this is a hard position to defend, it seems to me to be important to recognise it as part of the specifics of the critical and theoretical relationship with television, and as part of the question of television drama's pleasure. What I am suggesting is that that specificity has a lot to do with the closed, finished text which television drama offers: the 'well-made play' and 'good television'. To note the absence in television of the text which is open to tension, contradiction and the unconscious (forced open, perhaps, by the action of the visual discourse on the verbal) is not to argue for 'bad television' or the 'badly-made play', but simply to try to understand something of the effects on our relationship to television and our expectation of pleasure of the controlled discourse which results from the prestige of the writer, and the subordination of *mise en scène* to script.

The interest of *Dreams of Leaving* (the reason for identifying it as the point of reference for this article) is the extent to which the writer becomes the film-maker, and, more importantly but probably consequently, the extent to which this complicates the orthodox hierarchy of script and *mise en scène*. At the formal level, this seems to me to appear in the text to the extent that it consciously varies and exposes the look, playing on the relationship with the spectator rather than simply offering a window on the world, or merely implementing the script. The materiality of the *mise en scène*, its functioning as a discourse rather than a transparency, its quest for ironic distance, complicates the sense in which we can simply reject the film/play for its sadistic objectification of the woman. It does not make that objectification any more acceptable, since, in the end, the complication of the spectator's position may be nothing more than the wink of 'art television' at its complicit audience.

What *Dreams of Leaving* offers is not an exemplary and progressive text, but simply one of the few instances of television drama which is visually interesting and even visually pleasurable; to argue for its progressiveness on these terms would be dangerously formalist. More precisely, what *Dreams of Leaving* offers is

a useable example of a more deliberate and a more filmic *mise en scène*, and of the unsettling of the traditional division of labour within television drama: it represents a certain easy unorthodoxy of form and practice. What has to be considered is what makes that unorthodoxy so easy, and how far it simply represents a different orthodoxy: 'art television'.

Narrative

The narrative of *Dreams of Leaving* is structured around a set of encounters between William and Caroline. There are six major encounters:

- 1 the newspaper office at night;
- 2 begins in the gallery where Caroline works, and ends with Caroline leaving William's room;
- 3 begins at a press conference for the rock group to which Caroline is, in some way, attached, progresses through scenes in a hotel corridor, the band's office and William's room, to end in Andrew's room;
- 4 a dance centre where Caroline is rehearsing;
- 5 Caroline's flat;
- 6 Springfield Psychiatric Hospital to which Caroline has been committed with 'long-term damage'.

There is also a telephone conversation, a brief meeting in a Chinese restaurant, and a scene in which Caroline watches William in the newspaper office, he only becoming aware of her presence as she disappears out of the door.

The narrative opens with an expository sequence which establishes William's move from country to town, his employment on Fleet Street, and his search for girls; it closes with an epilogue which places William in 'mature' domesticity with a wife and two children, Caroline now a regretful memory. There are a number of sequences from which Caroline is absent which serve to establish a variety of social, historical and class contexts: Fleet Street, the 1970's rock music scene, drug culture, a press conference on Britain's proposed entry into the EEC, the suburban racism of Caroline's mother. These references have no other function than to contextualise the narrative within the particular configurations of British society in the early 1970s: they can be understood in the context of Hare's claim to be writing history plays:⁴

4 Text of a lecture given at King's College, Cambridge, March, 1978. Included in the published script of *Licking Hitler*, *ibid.*

For five years I have been writing history plays. I try to show the English their history. I write tribal pieces, trying to show how people behaved on this island, off this continental shelf, in this century. How this Empire vanished, how these ideals died.

Finally, there are a few transitions between main sequences, occasionally serving as visual illustrations of William's voice-over narration ('So it began, that very strange summer . . .'), occasionally serving simply as punctuation, comprising only a single unlocated shot: an exterior of William's flat or of the newspaper office, for example, which can only be identified by assumption since they are not located anywhere else in the film.

The main encounters have a temporal continuity (more or less), but may cover a number of locations which makes that continuity seem less continuous: it is difficult to classify all of them as sequences. Thus the third encounter begins with a glimpse of Caroline at a press reception for a rock band, moves to William's search for Caroline in various rooms in the hotel, to an emotional conversation in the hotel corridor, to the band's office (I am taking this from the script since the location is unclear in the film) where Caroline shows William her photographs taken in a brothel and talks about her parents, to William's room, and finally to Andrew's room. Two things are significant about this: the first is simply the ellipsis of the narrative, which is marked by the lack of flow from location to location and by the lack of information on Caroline's place in relation to the locations and to the band; she functions as an enigma within the narrative, inviting the spectator (and William) to construct her sense. The second is that the most reliable signifier of temporal continuity within such a sequence is Caroline's costume, which is strikingly different from encounter to encounter, but which within each encounter remains the same.

What holds this disparate narrative together is the commentary provided by William's voice-over, which recounts the memory of what happened seven years ago and his reflections on it. That is to say, William speaks from hindsight, with even his own 'present' domesticity contained within the overview of his explanatory discourse. In this sense, William's is the privileged discourse through which the spectator is given access to the narrative. But William's control of the narrative is qualified at two important points. First, William is not aware that this is a history play, a period piece. His discourse has no comment to make on

the significance of the wider social and cultural events of which his narrative is being offered as an exemplary part. Whatever exemplary historical significance the events may have is available only to the spectator through a discourse which is not William's, but is contained in those textual references (visual and narrative) to what are assumed to be 'tribal' experiences of the early 1970s: trendiness, cynicism, and sexual adventurousness; and, again implicitly, to what are assumed to be shared and defining political experiences such as the question of national identity in relation to Europe and the rise of middle-class racism, experiences which are keyed in in apparently incidental events like the press conference on the Common Market. This historical discourse takes place, as it were, behind William's back (he is frequently incidental to the scene) and functions, not as a reflection on the history, nor particularly as an argument about the inter-relationship of the sexual and the social, but simply as a series of recognition points by which Hare and his audience recognise each other: Hare is addressing an audience which is assumed to have shared that experience, and the pleasure which is offered is that of seeing one's 'innocence' replayed and validated as cultural experience.

Secondly, William's control of the narrative is weakened by the ironic distance from which he is presented. That is to say, although it is apparently William who tells the story, we do not see the story from William's point of view, but from the point of view of a superior knowledge which is able to see the inadequacy of William's understanding. William's 'unreliability' as a narrator is made available to us to the extent that his interpolated voice-over always falls short of our understanding of what is at stake in the events which it describes, and is confirmed when we find him reduced to a swinging marriage ('I mean I think a marriage is refreshed by affairs') having managed to escape the 1970s in a way which Caroline could not, and, importantly, having mastered sexuality. (It is further confirmed by the particular register of Bill Nighy's acting.) The effect of the irony is to give the spectator a distance from William, which is reinforced by his gratitude that Caroline is mad: a gratitude which, in its simultaneous unexpectedness and aptness, brings to the male spectator a certain pleasurable shock of recognition, however much it may confirm the moral rejection of William on the grounds of his self-centredness. The confession of his gratitude also, paradoxically begins a certain redemption for William which is continued into the epilogue, culminating in his closing lines:

Our lives dismay us. We know no comfort. We have dreams of leaving. Everyone I know.

21

Echoing the title of the play, these lines give it its retrospective significance, and rescue for William a self-awareness and an awareness of pain which we had not suspected. This exactly repeats the strategy of *Licking Hitler*, where again the 'innocent' (this time the woman) is given a discourse from hindsight which retrospectively and surprisingly explains the wider significance of the narrative. What is important for *Dreams of Leaving* is the ultimate ambivalence of the irony which in the end forgives William for his crassness and reveals him also as a silent and complex sufferer; at what expense to Caroline?

The play/film has been attacked for its sexism. This seems to me to function not simply in the way in which it is the woman who is brought to the point of psychosis by the narrative, but also in the episodic and elliptical structure of the narrative which breaks up the figure of Caroline into a series of types: chic gallery employee, groupie, 'committed' (feminist?) photographer, public relations executive, dancer. Caroline has a consistency, represented only by her clothes and visual appearance, within each episode, but figures as a different type (stereotype) from one episode to the next. The spectator shares something of William's confusion: Caroline represents the male fantasy of the mystery of female sexuality, the enigmatic woman, unknown and unknowable. While the film seems to slip off the hook of ideology by exposing the inadequacy of William's view and the disturbing implication of his sexual demands (her madness and his gratitude), it remains caught on the hook by itself leaving the woman as either doll-like (the wife) or Sphinx-like (Caroline), inexplicable, and ultimately catatonic, unable to explain.

It would be difficult to extend this into a final and general account of television drama's narrative: one can, however, hint at certain characteristics which might usefully be checked against the notions of 'serious drama' and 'art television'. One is a construction which seems to owe more to the compressed and implicit insights to the short story form, stressing situation and character relationship, than it does to the novelistic of classical film narrative with its hermeneutic codes impelling the reader forward along an unfolding chain of enigma. The other, more specific to 'art television', is a certain mode of narrative address which depends less on the involvement of the spectator in the story and more on an

ironic and superior distancing which allows us to recognise the author's discourse expressing his or her point of view behind the characters' backs or above their heads. This returns us to the centrality of authorship for the notion of 'art television'. One can anticipate that Hare's justification for the maleness of the discourse about sexuality in *Dreams of Leaving* would be that he is a man, and can only express his own point of view: can only express the world the way he sees it. The broader significance of this within the notion of 'art television' lies in its validation of the personal point of view which ultimately attempts to ground itself by referring back to the experience of the author, bringing social contradiction back to personal experience. This is implicit in television drama's sanctification of the creative writer. While there is clearly a pleasure for those who share a cultural or social experience in having it validated by art, there is also an absurdity in Hare offering his personal experience (even in the *Radio Times*) 'as something which a mass audience would recognise as a situation in which they'd been'. This is not to say that every piece of television should be directed to a 'mass audience', but to suggest the limitation which the prestige attached to 'one man's or woman's point of view' imposes on the address of 'serious drama'.

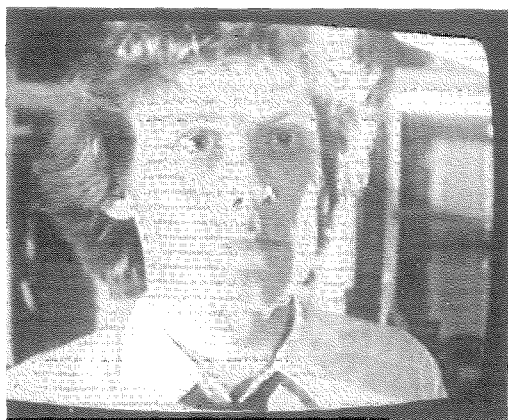
The look

It is in its conscious manipulation of the spectator's look that *Dreams of Leaving* seems most distinctive. This is probably most striking in the sequence in the newspaper office when William and Caroline first meet, and in the sequence which follows it in the gallery.

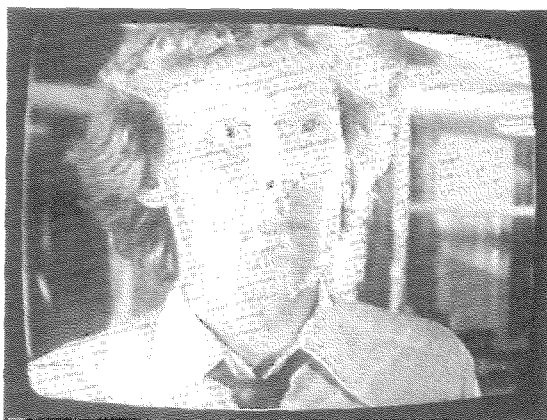
What is remarkable in the newspaper office sequence is the moment at which an exchange of relatively static shots is interrupted by Caroline's direct address to camera when she introduces herself. Is it to Colin, who has asked her a question? to William, whom we are given in the reverse-field shot? to the spectator, in his or her identification with the camera? The significance of the moment is secured in the field reverse-field pattern of four shots between William and Caroline, which are isolated from the flow of shots before and after by the music which covers the last three of the four shots, and by William's commenting voice-over: 'From that day on things were never easy' (a comment which in the published script is held over till a transitional exterior shot at the end of the sequence). But the real interest of the exchange is in the implication of the spectator in the place of William as the



1



3 Caroline: 'Caroline'

4 William (vo): 'From that day on things
were never easy'*Dreams of Leaving* — the newspaper office

point of Caroline's address, as the subject to whom she introduces (and offers) herself. The cliché of eyes meeting is given a certain materiality in the engagement and acknowledgement of the spectator's look, an engagement designed both to unsettle and to implicate the spectator. It seems to me to be precisely this conscious articulation of the look which makes Hare's film distinctive within television drama, and is the main reason that it has been 'taken up' in the challenge to naturalism.

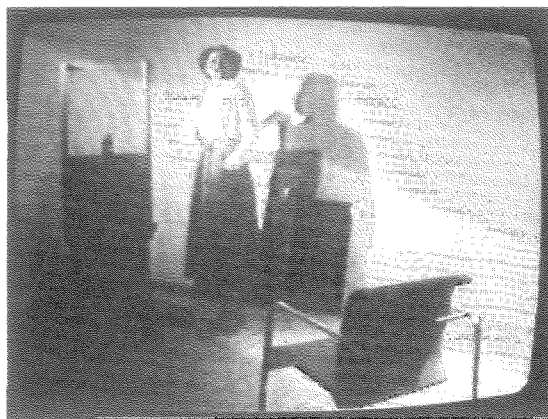
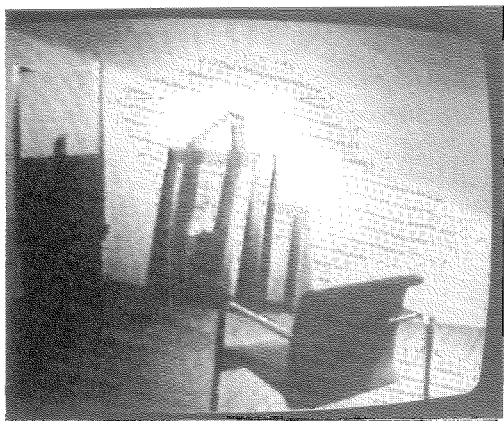
The sequence in the gallery is more complicated, and more difficult to describe. It is marked by the presence of one or two fairly elaborate moving camera shots which are notably absent from the rest of the film, and, even more strikingly by a series of arresting compositions of which, significantly, Caroline (Kate Nelligan) is the focal key. The fourth shot of the sequence, for example, opens with a dramatically lit still life composition of display easel, canvases, and chair; Caroline enters the frame, takes up a central position which, in a sense, completes the composition, and addresses William who remains out of frame. Caroline's address is again to the camera, though in a longer shot than in the previous instance, and on this occasion there is no reverse shot from William's point of view: within the composition, Caroline (Kate Nelligan) is the object of the spectator's admiring look, a look which is identified with the camera rather than with William. In a number of subsequent shots in the sequence Caroline is balanced in the frame by a Mondrian or a Rothko canvas, and in a field reverse-field sequence from William's point of view she is the focal point of a striking composition dominated by a huge Lichtenstein.

What is crucially significant here is the way in which, within the mode of address of 'art television', the woman is offered to the view of the spectator as a part of an artistic composition, rather than simply as the unjustified spectacle-in-herself of a more unsophisticated popular cinema. Kate Nelligan's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' is justified by the composition rather than directly by her sexuality. The spectator's fascination with her is given an excuse in art which masks its motivation in desire.

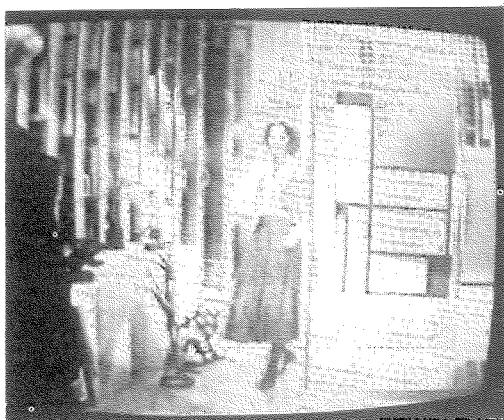
For the more general significance of this, an observation by Paul Willemen in his response to John Ellis's article on pornography is valuable:⁵

5 Paul Willemen,
'Letter to John',
Screen, vol 21, no
2, pp 55-6.

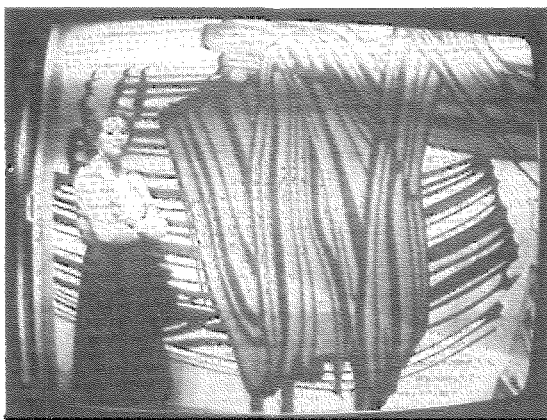
Whereas images in classic narrative cinema (eg Boetticher or Capra) use the frame as a mask, arty compositions . . . emphasise



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Dreams of Leaving — the gallery

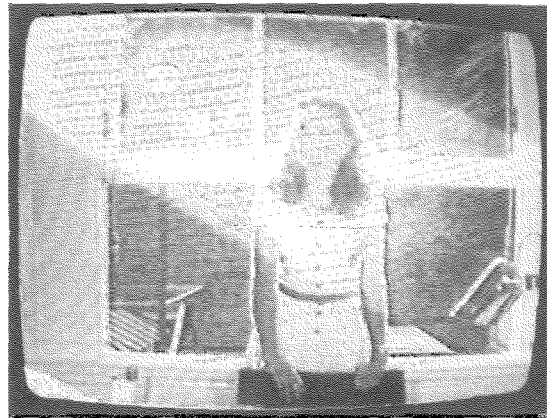
6 Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Cinema and Suture', and Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture', *Screen*, vol 18, no 4, 1977/78, pp 35-76.

the frame and, in so doing, also stress that the look of the viewer is co-extensive with that of the camera, that the two looks are one. In that way, they achieve an increase in their 'to-be-looked-at-ness', in terms of an increase in aesthetic effectivity while at the same time retaining the naturalisation of frame as mask for a continuous and homogeneous diegetic world. Such images, directly analogous to fetishes, stress the presence of an organising 'I' which uses (directs) the camera's look to circumscribe and organise the field of vision thus denying the autonomy while acknowledging the presence of the viewer's look, making it present and absent at the same time.

The highly deliberate *mise en scène* of *Dreams of Leaving* places a premium on 'arty compositions', and the rhetoric which this involves is crucial for questions of address, identification and narrative. The classic narrative cinema, as Oudart and others have argued,⁶ is marked by a certain progression through the shots:



Dreams of Leaving — compositions



10 11

in the first instance, we are given the image to enjoy in its fullness and our look is 'co-extensive with that of the camera'; in the next instance, our attention is drawn to the boundaries of the image, to the frame as mask which cuts off another scene beyond the frame, to the incompleteness of our view; and in the next instance, the incompleteness is filled by the reverse-field giving us the view which was lacking in the previous image. This pattern is absolutely fundamental to the rhetoric of classical narrative cinema, involving the spectator not simply at the level of the action (what happens next?) but also at the level of the look (what am I not seeing?), developing the narrative along a fantasy in which the

desire to see more is continually being stimulated only to be partially satisfied, the partiality of the satisfaction guaranteeing the reproduction of desire. This is the 'illusion cut to the measure of desire' to which Laura Mulvey refers, the voyeuristic pleasure of looking in order to see more than is offered. The carefully composed shots of *Dreams of Leaving*, on the other hand, and of the 'art television' which shares its sense of composition, operates within a different rhetoric, the image itself seeking to satisfy the look of the viewer, the frame as a term in the image's balance and completeness, rather than a mask cutting off another view and impelling the spectator to the next shot.

The effect of this is continued in another fundamental point of the rhetoric of *Dreams of Leaving*: the relative absence of a strongly marked point of view in which the spectator's look is identified with the look of a character whose directional eye movement out of frame calls attention to the frame as mask and provokes the move to the answering shot. In classic narrative cinema this identification of the spectator's desire to see with the look of a character within the fiction displaces the spectator's identification from camera to character, and gives the spectator a point of view and a position within the fiction as a subject of its world. The directional eye movement at the end of the shot also has the effect of motivating the cut in a way which masks its presence as a technical intrusion into the continuity of the world. Clearly, such patterns cannot be taken as monolithic essentialisms of narrative cinema: cinema operates also as spectacle, filling the spectator's look, and the positioning of the spectating subject involves a play rather than a stasis; but the continual relocation of the spectator's look within the fictional space is what produces the intensity of our identification and our involvement in classic narrative cinema.

In *Dreams of Leaving* the classically marked point of view shot (seer-seen-seer) is relatively rare, and both the absence of smooth links from shot to shot and the occasional refusal to provide the reverse-field to complete the exchange of views are raised to a definitive point of style. The particular mode of articulation of the look and the direction of the look towards composition, form a consistent strategy of *mise en scène* for this film/play, effectively giving the spectator the possibility of a certain distance from the characters and their actions, and to identify him or her with the camera, and, by extension, with its director. How far this can be generalised to television drama or 'art television' as a whole

needs to be considered cautiously since it is complicated by the technological distinctions between filmed and studio drama. Certainly one can see that within the development of a three-camera studio drama based on vision mixing and continuous recording (the resistance to editing in early studio drama), a strongly figured point of view shot is less likely to develop than in the single camera technology of film. The extent to which the rhetorical routines of early television have inflected current notions of standard practice, and the extent to which film would be implicated in this, could only be determined after considerably more research than I have done. But what does seem clear to me as a viewer of television drama is that, for whatever reasons, certain rhetorical figures which are arguably central to the rhetoric of narrative cinema have not developed, or have developed in much weaker forms, in the technical vocabulary of television. My argument would be that the *mise en scène* of *Dreams of Leaving* simply brings to a point of visual style (or stylisation) the fundamental rhetoric of television drama which has developed historically and technologically, and it is this rhetoric which produces our particular relation as spectators with 'art television'.

Identification

The point, again, is not to blame television drama for not being cinema, but to try to identify the specificity of television's particular articulation of the dramatic look, and the specificity of pleasure which this in turn produces. At the centre of all this is the question of identification. What I am suggesting is that the specific rhetoric of 'art television drama' operates against a close identification of the spectator with the look of the character, and hence the spectator is less tightly held into the fictional space. Freed from the fictional space, the spectator *watches* television (in a way which is quite different from the look within cinema) without being lost in it. What the rhetoric produces is a relatively unmediated identification of the look of the spectator with that of the camera; an identification which can, at least potentially, be taken up by the author who may mark out his position as the I/eye of the camera, authorising its point of view on the world.

The effect of this rhetoric is reinforced in a number of ways. Narratives within the single play tend to be constructed less around the novelistic with its patterns of identification and involvement, and more around a concentrated 'situation drama'

taking its interest from the play of character rather than from the extension and deferral of action. The play of character gives a certain prominence to acting, which operates theatrically rather than cinematically: it seems to me that whereas in cinema acting disappears into identification (Bogart, says Hawks, doesn't act: the camera just loves him), in theatre we tend much more to watch acting, to be aware of performance and of the distance between performance and real action. To the extent that television shares theatre's mode of acting (and its actors) our identification with its fictional world is the less. Finally, the sense of being in control of the image (rather than swept away by it) is clearly supported by the image's scale and by the domestic conditions within which it is watched. If narcissism is indeed a factor in the pleasure of looking, that pleasure is likely to be diminished along with the scale of the anthropomorphic image; equally the voyeuristic experience is likely to be qualified in some way by the intrusion of the real in its most domestic form into the fantasy.

This is to suggest that the reason we seem to lose ourselves less in 'serious drama', the reason we invest less, has a lot to do with the loss of a certain kind of visual and narrative pleasure which depends on a particular rhetoric, and with the modification in the degree and nature of identification. At the same time, this cannot be allowed to slip into some notion of the distancing which Brecht urges as the necessary condition of the active, critical spectator, or of the 'disidentificatory practices' which Peter Wollen identifies with modernism.⁷ Such distancing or disidentification involves an intervention into the naturalness of the world of representations, an interruption which allows the reader/viewer/spectator to see the world and its representations, as if for the first time, in their un-natural strangeness. Quite differently from this, the distance which is produced by the rhetoric of television drama and 'art television' seems to me to operate within the terms of an ideology of self-expression which privileges the artist, liberating the viewer from identification with the fictional world of the characters in order to identify him or her all the more with the personal point of view of the artist who shows and knows the world.

David Hare shows us a personal point of view of sexuality; but more than that, he operates within a rhetorical system which allows us to separate our look from the characters and identify it with the author of the composed views of which Caroline/Nelligan is the focal component. The acting carries the process

7 Peter Wollen, 'Modernism Defended', *Screen*, vol 21, no 2, Summer 1980, pp 15-26.

further. The performances of Bill Nighy and Kate Nelligan are of a different order: distanced from William/Nighy by the naïvety of his performance (how else does one characterise his acting style in, say, the scene in William's room where he forces an anger against Caroline for her incapacity to make love with him?), and by the knowing winks his voice-over commentary shares with the spectator ('No, she hadn't; she still hadn't slept with me.'). we are free to direct our attention, with Hare, to Caroline, to Kate Nelligan's performance singled out in the reviews for its sexuality. The pleasure is that of a *mise en scène* which plays distance off against desire in a game of male subjectivity, but what it invites is a complicity with the author every bit as insidious as the strategies of classical narrative.

'Art television'

The term is imprecise and provisional, and reference to a single example of what might be included in it does not close it down into a definition. The status of, say, documentary drama within it would be uncertain, and I suspect that it would have to include also a number of prestigious documentary series (*Life on Earth*, *Shock of the New*) which operate their own rhetoric of the visual pleasure of the natural or aesthetic world. What I am trying to refer to in terms of drama may be less a genre with specific codes than a working ideology within television and criticism: the ideology of the artist, and, its extension, the ideology of television as a writer's medium. Such an ideology, and the often contradictory discourses which come into conflict around it (censorship on the one hand, creative and professional freedom on the other) is more of an institutional, social and cultural product than a question of texts and rhetoric. What I am interested in here, though, is how the ideology is played out in the relationship of viewer, author and text, and how it is supported by a specific rhetorical system and mode of address.

Beyond that, I am less interested in defining 'art television', than in using its uncertainty as a way of opening out some of the received orthodoxies of institutional and critical discourses about television. The most apparent of these orthodoxies in relation to drama is the status given to the writer, and the main work of the article is to try to understand that in a way that goes beyond the question simply of artistic control. But it seems necessary also to begin to open out the question of flow. There is an argument against the study of the single play or 'serious drama' which says

it is impossible to isolate its effects and address from the flow of television into which it is continually recuperated. My argument, though, for the urgency of an understanding of 'art television' and 'serious drama' is that flow is not simply an endless, seamless, and undifferentiated continuity, but is crucially a hierarchy in which certain forms are privileged, by both producers *and* viewers, in terms of credibility, authority and prestige. 'Art television' functions, both for the viewers and for the institutions, to make television as a whole more serious, and its appearance within the evening's viewing invites (and, from probably a minority of the audience, is given) a different form of attention. The single play is indeed less predictable.

But it is a minority interest. At the most apparent level, an 'art television', like an 'art cinema', seems to be marked by a certain social exclusiveness, though the actual boundaries would be hard to define. Given this, the term appears within progressive discourses with, at the very least, a pejorative taint, if not an outright rejection, and work on television fiction tends to concentrate on the popular forms which address larger audiences. Such work is clearly essential. But it seems to me also that there is a political need to engage with those forms which are privileged within the dominant discourses. Progressive discourses about television have to take 'art television' seriously, both in its institutional place and in its individual programmes and programme categories, insofar as it is 'art television' which informs and supports the contexts, the working ideologies, the standards and the practices of 'good television', giving it its cultural prestige and its social credibility.

This article was commissioned by the BFI Education Department for use in their 1981 Summer School on 'Television Fictions'.

I am grateful to Tony Pearson and Gillian Skirrow for comments on the earlier draft.
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CHARLOTTE BRUNSDON

'CROSSROADS'

NOTES ON SOAP OPERA

Husband to wife weeping as she watches TV: 'For heaven's sake, Emily! It's only a commercial for acid indigestion.'

Joke on Bryant & May matchbox.

INTRODUCTION: A GENDERED AUDIENCE?

The audience for soap opera is usually assumed to be female.¹ In these notes I would like to examine this assumption, and the extent to which the notion of a gendered audience can be useful to us in the understanding of a British soap-opera, *Crossroads*.

Initially, I should like to make a distinction between the subject positions that a text constructs, and the social subject who may or may not take these positions up. We can usefully analyse the 'you' or 'yous' that the text as discourse constructs, but we cannot assume that any individual audience member will necessarily occupy these positions.² The relation of the audience to the text will not be determined solely by that text, but also by positionalities in relation to a whole range of other discourses — discourses of motherhood, romance and sexuality for example. Thus it may well be that visual pleasure in

narrative cinema is dependent on identification with male characters ... their gaze at female characters, but it does not necessarily follow that any individual audience member will unproblematically occupy this masculine position. Indeed, feminist film criticism usefully deconstructs the gendering of

1 For example, early research on American radio soaps, either assumes a female audience, or only investigates one. (See H Herzog, 'On Borrowed Experience' in *Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science*, vol 9 no 65, 1941; Rudolph Arnheim, 'The World of the Daytime Serial' in *Radio Research* nos 42-43. Lazarsfeld and Stanton (eds), New York 1944; H Kauffman, 'The Appeal of Specific Daytime Serials' *Radio Research*, op cit.) It is of course precisely the perceived 'feminine' appeal of the genre which has fuelled recent feminist interest (see for instance, Richard Dyer et al, *Coronation Street*, BFI Television Monograph no 13, London 1981, and Tania Modleski, 'The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas', *Film Quarterly* vol 33 no 1, 1979).

2 See, for instance, Steve Neale, 'Propaganda', *Screen* vol 18 no 3 1977, Paul Willemsen, 'Notes on subjectivity', *Screen* vol 19 no 1 1978, and David Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, BFI, London 1980.

this 'you'. As J Winship has recently argued: 'A feminist politics of representation . . . has then to engage with the social reader, as well as the social text.'³

The interplay of social reader and social text can be considered by examining the extent to which a gendered audience is implied in programme publicity, scheduling and advertisements. The Independent Broadcasting Authority, in its 1979 annual handbook, groups *Crossroads* with other Drama serials:

*TV drama serials have for many years been an essential ingredient in the programme diet of a large and devoted audience. Established favourites such as Coronation Street and Crossroads continue to develop themes and situations which often deal with the everyday problems and difficulties to which many viewers can relate. Occasionally the more adventurous type of serial is produced.*⁴

The femininity of the audience is specified, apart from the structuring dietary metaphor, in the opposition of 'devoted' and 'everyday' to 'adventurous'. There are a wide range of 'spin-off' materials associated with *Crossroads* — novels, special souvenir supplements, interview material, and a *Crossroads* Cookbook. I will take up the question of the incoherence of *Crossroads* narratives below.

In terms of scheduling, although *Crossroads* is broadcast at different times in different regions (stripped across four evenings a week),⁵ it is always broadcast within the 5.15 pm-7.30 pm slot. That is, with early evening, weekday transmission the programme is definitely not scheduled in the prime time in which it is expected to maximise on a

male audience. If we accept Richard Paterson's argument that notions of the family and the domestic dominate the scheduling of British television programmes, then fathers are not expected to control television choice at this point. Paterson also suggests a relationship between scheduling and programme structure:

*Its narrative is constructed of multiple short segments, with continual repetition of narrative information, but no overall dramatic coherence in any episode. In part this structure reflects its place in the schedule: continual viewing has to be ensured even though meal times and other domestic interruptions might make it impossible to follow a coherent narrative.*⁶

The broadcast slot of *Crossroads* is surrounded by magazine news programmes, panel games and other serials — all suitable for family, and interrupted, viewing. However, the advertising that frames, and erupts within, the programme is quite clearly addressed to a feminine consumer — beauty aids, breakfast cereals, instant 'man-appeal' meals and cleaning products: the viewer as sexual, as mother, as wife, as housewife, in contrast to the ads for lawn mowers, car gadgets, DIY equipment or large family purchases which dominate from 8.30 pm on. These 'extra textual'

3 J Winship, 'Handling Sex', *Media Culture and Society*, vol 3 no 1 1981.

4 *Television and Radio 1979*, Independent Broadcasting Authority, London 1979.

5 These notes are based on 1978 research when *Crossroads* was still four evenings per week, as opposed to the three at present.

6 Richard Paterson, 'Planning the Family: The Art of the Schedule', *Screen Education* no 35, Summer 1980.

34 factors suggest that women are the target audience for *Crossroads*.

A DISCONTINUOUS TEXT

The ideological problematic of soap-opera — the frame or field in which meanings are made, in which significance is constructed narratively — is that of 'personal life'. More particularly, personal life in its everyday realisation through personal relationships. This can be understood to be constituted primarily through the representations of romances, families and attendant rituals — births, engagements, marriages, divorces and deaths. In marxist terms this is the sphere of the individual outside waged labour. In feminist terms, it is the sphere of women's 'intimate oppression'. Ideologically constructed as the feminine sphere, it is within this realm of the domestic, the personal, the private, that feminine competence is recognised. However, the action of soap-opera is not restricted to familial or quasi-familial institutions but, as it were, *colonises* the public masculine sphere, representing it from the point of view of the personal.

Thus in *Crossroads* we have a family run business, the Crossroads motel, with an attached garage. The motel is near a village, Kings Oak, which at various times has included a market-garden, a doctor's surgery, a post-office, an antique shop, and so on. Regular characters are members of one of three groups — the Crossroads family, the motel/garage workforce, or the village. The fictional community, clearly socially hierarchised through *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, is kept interacting through a series of interlocking economic relationships, but this business interaction is of diegetic importance only as the site of personal relationships. It is always emotionally significant personal

interaction, often reported in dialogue, which is narratively foregrounded. This can be seen most clearly through the narrative construction of time and place.

There is no single linear time flow. The minimum three concurrent narratives proceed through a succession of short segments (rarely exceeding 2½ minutes). In contrast with classical narrative cinema,⁷ the temporal relationship between segments is rarely encoded. Time in general moves forward, although there is repetition at the beginning of episodes. Relationships between segments can be read as in most cases sequential or simultaneous. One continuous scene can be broken into several segments — notoriously over commercial breaks and between episodes, but this is a standard intra-episodic suspense device. The lack of any overarching time scheme permits the rise and fall of different narrative threads. As each narrative has only its time of exposition, there is no loss of 'real' or referential time if a narrative lapses. Similarly, the very simplicity of the use of 'interruption' as the major form of narrative delay, extending dramatic action, also works against the construction of a coherent referential time. The different present tenses of the narrative co-exist, temporally unhierarchised.

Space in *Crossroads* is also organised in a way which is quite distinct from the conventions of classical narrative cinema, conventions which are carried over to some other forms of television drama. The shoestring budgets mean very restricted sets (all internal, usually no more than

7 I recognise that 'classical narrative cinema' is not monolithic. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in *Film Art*, New York, 1979, give an account of the conventions of the narrative fiction film in the west.

five in one episode) and few available camera positions.⁸ Generally, sets have two distinct spaces arranged laterally to each other — that is, there are two distinct camera fields, and it is the articulation of these fields which constructs the space.⁹ Some sets allow only one camera position. These camera set-ups are not variable, and camera movement is limited. Most scenes are shot in mid-shot or medium close up, opening with either a close-up or a longer shot. The narrative does not mobilise space within any particular set, nor is there any attempt to make the different spaces of the different sets cohere. We are instead presented with a series of tableau-like views, more theatrical than cinematic. The sets thus function very literally as setting or background, seen always from the same points of view, as familiar as the room in which the viewer has the television.

I am thus arguing that the diegetic world of *Crossroads* is temporally and spatially fragmented, and that this fragmentation, accompanied by repetitious spatial orientation, foregrounds that dialogue of emotional and moral dilemma which makes up the action. The coherence of the serial does not come from the subordination of space and time to linear narrativity, as it does in classical narrative cinema, but from the continuities of moral and ideological

frameworks which inform the dialogue. It is these frameworks which are explored, rehearsed and made explicit for the viewer in the repeated mulling over of actions and possibilities. *Crossroads* is in the business not of creating narrative excitement, suspense, delay and resolution, but of constructing moral consensus about the conduct of personal life. There is an endless unsettling, discussion and resettling of acceptable modes of behaviour within the sphere of personal relationships.

There are two key elements in this. Firstly, structurally, the plurality of story lines, which allows the use of the narrative strategy of interruption, and secondly, diegetically, the plot importance accorded to forms of lying and deceit. Structurally, although the different physical spaces of narratives do not cohere, except in the meeting place of the motel lobby, the same set of events, or the same dilemma, will be discussed, by different characters in 'their own' environments. A range of different opinions and understandings of any one situation will thus be voiced. At the same time, the use of interruption, the consistent holding off of *dénouement* and knowledge, invites the viewer to engage in exactly the same type of speculation and judgment. The viewer can, as it were, practise possible outcomes — join in the debate about how a particular event is to be understood.

The use of deceit in the narrative works slightly differently. By deceit, I mean the development of a narrative line which the audience knows that one character is consciously lying or misleading other characters. Here, the viewer is in a position of privileged knowledge in relation to the protagonists, and can see clearly what

8 Production constraints of *Crossroads* are discussed by Geoff Brown, 'I'm Worried about Chalet Nine', *Time Out* 24-30 November 1978, and R Miles 'Everyday Stories, Everyday Folk' MA Dissertation, University of Leicester, 1980.

9 I am indebted to Andy Lowe ('Narrative Spaces and Closure' Unpublished paper, Media Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham 1977) who originally discussed *Crossroads* in these terms.

36 and who is 'right'. The drama of morality is here produced by the tension between the fact that 'good' characters must continue to be trusting, to remain 'good', but that they will suffer unless they 'find out' about the true nature of another character, x.

In both cases, what is being set in play, or exercised, are repertoires of understandings and assumptions about personal and familial relationships, in which the notion of individual character is central. Thus although soap-opera narrative may seem to ask 'What will happen next?' as its dominant question, the terrain on which this question is posed is determined by a prior question — 'What kind of a person is this?'. And in the ineluctable posing of this question, of all characters, whatever their social position, soap-opera poses a potential moral equality of all individuals.

A GENDERED AUDIENCE — 2

Recently, Tania Modleski has argued for the textual inscription of a female (maternal) subject in American soap opera. She has suggested that the multiple narrative structure of soap-opera demands multiple identification on the part of the viewer, and thus constitutes the viewer as a type of ideal mother 'a person who possesses greater wisdom than all her children, whose sympathy is large enough to encompass the claims of all her family . . . and who has no demands of her own'.¹⁰ I will consider the related question of the type of cultural competence that *Crossroads* as soap-opera narrative(s) demands of its social reader.

Just as a Godard film requires the possession of certain forms of cultural

capital on the part of its audience to 'make sense' — an extra-textual familiarity with certain artistic, linguistic, political and cinematic discourses — so too does *Crossroads*/soap-opera. The particular competences demanded by soap opera fall into three categories:

- 1 Generic knowledge — familiarity with the conventions of soap opera as a genre. For example, expecting discontinuous and cliff-hanging narrative structures.
- 2 Serial-specific knowledge — knowledge of past narratives and of characters (in particular, who belongs to who.
- 3 Cultural knowledge of the socially acceptable codes and conventions for the conduct of personal life.

I will only comment on the third category here. The argument is that the narrative strategies and concerns of *Crossroads* call on the traditionally feminine competencies associated with the responsibility for 'managing' the sphere of personal life. It is the culturally constructed skills of femininity — sensitivity, perception, intuition and the necessary privileging of the concerns of personal life — which are both called on and practised in the genre. The fact that these skills and competencies, this type of cultural capital, is ideologically constructed as natural, does not mean, as many feminists have shown, that they are the *natural* attributes of femininity. However, under present cultural and political arrangements, it is more likely that female viewers will possess this repertoire of both sexual and maternal femininities which is called on to fill out the range of narrative possibilities when, for example, the phone rings. That is, when Jill is talking to her mother about

¹⁰ Tania Modleski, op cit.

her marriage (17 January 1979), and the phone rings, the viewer needs to know not only that it is likely to be Stan (her nearly ex-husband) calling about custody of their daughter Sarah-Jane (serial-specific knowledge) and that we're unlikely to hear the content of the phone-call in that segment (generic knowledge) but also that the mother's 'right' to her children is no longer automatically assumed. These knowledges only have narrative resonance in relation to discourses of maternal femininity which are elaborated elsewhere, already in circulation and brought to the programme by the viewer. In the enigma that is then posed — will Jill or Stan get Sarah-Jane? — questions are also raised about who, generally and particularly *should* get custody. The question of what *should* happen is rarely posed 'openly' — in this instance it was quite clear that 'right' lay with Jill. But it is precisely the terms of the question, the way in which it relates to other already circulating discourses, if you like, the degree of its closure, which form the site of the construction of moral consensus, a

construction which 'demands', seeks to implicate, a skilled viewer.

I am thus arguing that *Crossroads* textually implies a feminine viewer to the extent that its textual discontinuities require a viewer competent within the ideological and moral frameworks, the rules, of romance, marriage and family life to make sense of it.

Against critics who complain of the redundancy of soap-opera, I would suggest that the radical discontinuities of the text require extensive, albeit interrupted, engagement on the part of the audience, before it becomes pleasurable. This is not to designate *Crossroads* 'progressive' but to suggest that the skills and discourses mobilised by its despised popularity have partly been overlooked because of their legitimisation as natural (feminine).

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JESUS G REQUENA

NARRATIVITY/DISCURSIVITY IN THE AMERICAN TELEVISION FILM

Translator's note:
This article was written at a time when Spanish television, already swamped by North American television *series*, was starting to show a number of (again North American) *serials*.

1 AMERICAN TV FILM series are made up of units consisting of completely autonomous stories. Any change, therefore, in the order in which the stories are broadcast — even if it has been fixed in advance — is irrelevant.

2 The significance of TV film series does not lie in their narrativity (the scope of the story is confined exclusively to each unit in the series), nor even in their continuity (there is no progress or accumulation of any kind; the order in which the films are broadcast is always changeable). But nor is the significance of a series limited to the mere temporal (weekly) appearance of its autonomous units. To say this would lead one to ignore the structural peculiarity which constitutes the significance of TV series: their recurring structure.

3 And, because there is a structure (and not simply the temporal succession of independent units), it makes sense to talk about the series as a complex discourse (and not just as the temporal succession of independent discourses).

4 Introducing this approach into the analysis of TV films allows two specific areas of analysis to be established:

a) the analysis of the autonomous units, the TV films themselves, and

b) the analysis of the series as articulation of the autonomous (not independent) units which constitute it.

5 Or, in other words, if the scope of the narrativity is limited to the specific TV films (the series as such does not have a narrative structure), the scope of the discursivity needs to be analysed at two levels:

a) the TV films as narrative discourses, and

b) the series as non-narrative discourse.

6 Only from this point of view, which is based on the recognition of the specific discursive structure of the series, does the series constitute a specific object of analysis not reducible to the collection of TV films which constitute it.¹

7 . From this point of view, we can define the series as a complex discourse with a recurring structure, made up of autonomous discursive units of a narrative character which are broadcast periodically and which are interchangeable.²

8 Recurring structure: each TV film has a definite beginning and end, completely independent of the end and the beginning of the TV films broadcast before and after it. Or in other words: each story is constructed as if the ones before and after it did not exist. But the recurring character of the structure of the series is not limited to it, rather it permeates the narrative structure of each TV film: each new TV film is always the repetition of one and the same narrative structure.

9 There are two immediate results of this particular recurring structure: the disappearance of biography and the disappearance of history. The few biographical details which characterise the protagonist, are — when they exist — always placed before the beginning of the series. And since there can be no transformation of the character of the protagonist throughout the series, it also becomes impossible to transform it within one TV film. Thus psychologism dies at the hands of the TV series, and with it melodrama also dies.³

10 This disappearance of biography complements perfectly the TV film's tendency to identify a character with the social role he portrays. The protagonists of TV films are not individuals marked by their personal history, they are, almost exclusively, subjects defined by their social role: doctors, detectives, lawyers, teachers, spies, police. They do not have a 'psychology' (biographical characteristics) but *attributes*: the attributes which the social role which they carry out gives them. And here the recurring structure of the series fits in perfectly: each new story has no meaning

1 In the end, from the point of view of ideological analysis the pertinence of the conceptual distinction between these two areas of discourse (the TV film and the series) can only be justified if one sees in the series some ideological effects which cannot be established by the analysis of the separate TV films which constitute it.

2 Clearly this definition doesn't apply to the *serial*. See note 5.

3 We have only found one exception to this in American television series of the last few years: *The House on the Prairie*. In this one its melodramatic aspect and the biographisation of the characters through the successive programmes partially weakens its repetitive structure and at the same time, makes it rather like a serial. As less developed precedents for this hybrid format we can mention *Bonanza* and *The Virginian*.

other than the repetition of the deployment of those attributes.

11 History as well as biography disappears. The recurring structure of the series is converted into a perfect metaphor of the social order and the mechanism of its permanent reproduction. The conflicts which constitute the motor of each story are an integral part of this social order: illness, crime or the problems of apprenticeship are presented so that the doctors, police, lawyers and teachers can carry out their respective roles. In other words, conflict is not a moment of change but of reproduction. And history does not exist, or it is only a farcical repetition of itself.⁴

12 We have said that the scope of the story is limited to the units in the series. In this respect each TV film forms an autonomous story. And, clearly, there is no story without conflict. The conflict, and only it, gives meaning to the dynamic of the narration. Because there is conflict, confrontation and *dénouement* are possible.

13 Well, then, the recurring structure which characterises the series requires that the *dénouement* of the story lead to the reproduction of the situation which existed before the conflict began. It is only this way that each new TV film can begin from the very beginning. But on the other hand, the conflict is necessary and not only for diegetic reasons. Only if crimes, illnesses and bad students exist do lawyers, police, doctors and teachers have any purpose. As we said, the conflict is the *raison d'être* of their existence. And here, diegetic and ideological requirements coincide: at the same time as it sets the story in motion, conflict makes it possible for the attributes of the protagonist to be displayed. It must be noted, moreover, that the development of the conflict and its repression take up almost all the story. TV films begin with the appearance of the conflict (the crime, the first symptom of the illness) and they end only a moment after its resolution (the happy ending in which order is seen to be re-established — somebody makes a joke, everyone laughs, the images freezes — is a moment which in TV films of the last few years has been reduced to a minimum). On the other hand, there are no dead moments in the narration. Practically all the sequences are narrative nuclei and the few catalyses which are scattered through the story have very little meaning of their own, they are simply connections between the nuclei which move the narrative on (aerial views of the city, the characters on a car journey, etc). Note that in most cases they are standard shots repeated systematically in each TV film.

14 From what has been said up to now follow two apparently contradictory principles, which govern the discursive construction of the TV film and of the series: 41

a) the principle of maximum narrative economy,

b) the principle of maximum redundancy.

a) (At the level of the TV film) the principle of maximum narrative economy: everything which does not affect the development of the conflict directly must disappear or become invisible (in fact, since they are identical throughout the series, the catalyses mentioned earlier are erased for the viewer — they are the moment for lighting a cigarette, for patting the dog or sending the children to bed!).

b) (At the level of the series) the principle of maximum redundancy: redundancy taken to the extreme of repetition (the same unchanging hero, a narrative structure repeated mechanically in all the TV films).

15 The real ideological effect of the global apparatus: the rhetoric of the attributes of power results from the meshing of these two specific principles from each of the two discursive fields.

16 In fact, since it is set up at the beginning of the film the *dénouement* is unimportant. But what the protagonist does is also unimportant, since it is just as predetermined. What is really important is the rhetoric of the situation, the rhetoric of the deployment of the attributes of the hero.

17 A rhetoric which, clearly is also an erotics, an erotics and a rhetoric of power. We have already said that the protagonists don't exist beyond the social roles they embody. Since they are limited to the exercising of their attributes (of power: to heal, arrest, kill, educate, dominate, repress etc) which their roles give them, nothing out of the ordinary can be expected from the behaviour of these personalities. What is important, therefore, is the rhetoric and erotics (or erotic rhetoric) of the way they carry out their roles: the significance of the words with which they persuade, the logic (and mechanism) of their deeds, the smile with which they torture or the elegance with which they fire a revolver.

18 These heroes don't have a psychology, but their enemies do. The good guy doesn't have a psychology because he embodies a social role. The bad guy is, by definition, a pathological case.

19 An unspoken principle exists within dominant yankee ideology: the unquestionability of the social order. Therefore, in the order of knowledge which is based on that social order, sociology has no proper theoretical status of its own; it is gradu-

5 Clearly it also recognises another kind of history (but still not a *present history*): that of its origins. A history for which the perfect format for its representation lies the structure of the television *serial* (*Rich Man, Poor Man; Captains and the Kings, Roots*). The serial, as distinct from the series, is a narrative discourse (with a non-recurring structure) made up of only partially autonomous units which are not interchangeable. In it there is room

42 ally reduced, in fact, to a discipline which merely identifies focuses of conflict. But sociology cannot explain conflict. This would require the recognition of structural contradictions within the social order, which would lead sooner or later, to questioning it. All conflict, is, therefore, by definition, dysfunctional. Its origin is not social but individual, psychological. Therefore, the ideology which supports the order of knowledge in the USA gives psychology an important role in the terrain of the social sciences. Conflicts are always pathological, the product of inadequate training, of individual maladaptation to a social order, which in itself is not questionable. In this perfect alliance between functionalist sociology and behaviourist psychology only psychology can produce explanations about social conflicts. And, in fact, by means of an ambiguous discipline called 'social psychology', psychology exports its concepts into sociology thus making it impossible for sociology to establish an autonomous theoretical status. As we have said before, the only role which remains for it lies in the technology of conflict limitation.

20 This short excursion through the terrain of epistemology has a justification: in any North American TV film of the last few years the ideological manoeuvres which sustain the order of knowledge in the USA show up very crudely. All conflict is the result of workings of a pathological individual. The development of the story is identified with the setting in motion of the regulatory mechanisms of the system: cure: retraining; repression.

21 A recurring structure. The capitalist social order only recognises one history: that of its permanent reproduction.⁶ The movement of capital (the central movement of the entire social system, by which it is sustained) is the cyclical movement of its reproduction and expansion. A cyclical movement, which on the other hand feeds on the contradictions (conflicts) which it produces.⁶

The television series, with its particular repetitive recurring structure, makes a perfect format for the representation of this movement as the systematic reproduction of the dominant social order. The narrativity of the units of which it is made up can thus be seen to be determined by the non-narrativity which characterises the discursivity of the series. A non-narrativity which in a certain way is profoundly narrative: the narrative of the permanent repetition, the systematic self-reproduction of a social order.

Contracampo, vol 1 no 2, May 1979
Translation by Susan Honeyford

for the conflict as a moment of historical change, the psychologisation of characters and melodrama.

6 'There exists "a type of negation which is at the same time illusory and real", It is above all in *Capital* that Marx shows how it works. This negation, in fact constitutes the nucleus of *all processes of reproduction*, since it represents "an endless repetition". Thus Marx shows that the *separation* between the proletariat and the means of production is *negated* in the process of the circulation of capital, in its labour power is transformed into its *opposite*: variable capital; in this form labour power is *united* with the means of production. This negation of the separation of the direct producers and the means of production nevertheless allows for the *retention of the relation of separation* which is characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.' [author's emphasis] Charles Bettelheim, *La dialéctica en Mao*, Cuadernos Anagrama, Barcelona, 1975.

PATRICIA R ZIMMERMAN

INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY PRODUCERS AND THE AMERICAN TELEVISION NETWORKS

I would be the first to admit that there is definitely some very interesting work being done by independents but there are some pitfalls too . . . If a network is licensed and accountable to the Federal Communications Commission, it must be absolutely certain when working with independents that their standards are the same as your own.

— Pam Hill, Executive Producer for
ABC News Documentary Unit¹

Pam Hill's argument points to some of the contradictions inherent in the operations of the American television networks: competition between ABC, NBC and CBS pushes them towards innovation, while at the same time their conservative, governmentally regulated, corporate operations steer them towards standardisation. Independent documentary producers like the Raymonds, Robert Drew or Barbara Kopple may produce innovative work, but the networks remain

committed to maximising their commercial profit, with the least financial risk on the one hand and the least government intervention on the other.

This tension between competitive business interests and the federal government's regulatory agency is an outcome of the fact that the networks licence a portion of the limited electromagnetic spectrum, which, according to American communications law, remains in the public domain. To ensure that the networks operate in the public interest, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the governmental regulatory agency for communications, grants and renews licences, apportions radio and TV channels, investigates monopoly practices and formally registers citizens' complaints. However, American constitutional law prohibits the FCC from rulemaking on programme content and from censorship, although the agency does possess powers to determine specified amounts of programming designated in the 'public interest'.

Although the national networks claim that their affiliated local stations act

¹ Lyn Hoffman Keating, 'Producing Documentaries for ABC News: Pam Hill, Executive Producer' *Filmmaker Monthly*, December, 1979, p 30.

44 independently, the national networks do in fact bring national advertisers and local stations together, while the stations that are networked share programming costs. Since the networks control all their own news production (an outcome of FCC regulations pertaining to broadcasting in 'the public good'), few local stations can afford to produce documentaries, since they rarely generate enough advertiser support. The networks argue that public affairs programming obtained from outside — independently produced — may not conform to FCC regulations concerning 'balance' and thereby threaten their licences and open up the possibility of litigation. Of course, independently produced programmes are not necessarily oppositional; many independent producers function as entrepreneurs, with little political concern beyond profit maximisation.

The networks' conservative economic policies towards independently produced documentaries may be beginning to crumble, however. In 1980, 26 independent documentary producers (Emile de Antonio and Barbara Kopple among them) filed suit against the three networks and the television stations owned and operated by them, contending that their monopolisation of news and public affairs programming violates anti-trust laws. Because the FCC controls broadcasting's tendency towards monopoly practice with strict regulations on media cross-ownership, for example, this suit argues that the networks' refusal to allow independently produced public affairs programmes and news access to the publicly owned airwaves constitutes monopoly practice. This case, called *Levitch et al v CBS et al*, cuts at the heart of network news structures, by charging that the networks control the

'marketplace of ideas'. Should the plaintiffs win, the repercussions from the suit would extend far beyond the \$234 million in damages that would be awarded to the independents. The networks would be forced completely to restructure their news operations to allow and encourage the purchase of independently produced news. The producers argue in the suit that the networks' behaviour and policies against independent documentaries constitute a restraint of trade under the Sherman Act. Since under their affiliation contracts, the networks' local stations are bound to accept a minimum amount of network material, the situation is further aggravated.

Levitch et al v CBS et al also challenges the domination of the networks in the field of cultural production. While the networks argue that they compete with each other, there is no question that they function as profit maximising corporations first and public interest organisations last. The situation grows increasingly complex because the government refuses to rule on any issues of content, on the grounds that this would infringe the First Amendment, which protects freedom of speech. Access by independents to the public airwaves is only slightly better on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), where the majority of public affairs programmes are purchased from large suppliers rather than from small independent film concerns. The crux of the controversy between independent documentary producers and the networks lies in the structure of the networks, and the *Levitch* suit addresses the matter directly.

Independent producers, since they are not bound by the networks' parameters of debate, may be in a position to challenge or at least to expand the

terms of public discussion of certain issues. Independent documentaries are particularly threatening to the discourse of the networks, because they may force the networks to relinquish the established presuppositions of debate in capitalist communications systems: the set of limitations which the system must share in order, in Stuart Hall's words, 'to disagree'.² Since the networks structure consensus, they tend to repress and label as illegitimate that which they cannot absorb. Notice how Floyd Abrams, NBC's lawyer in the *Levitich* case, frames his argument:

*There are very grave constitutional problems in any system that would compel broadcasters to broadcast material, especially news, against their will. The danger of starting down the road that would put the FCC or the courts in the business of saying who should broadcast and produce news is the highest level of First Amendment danger.*³

The First Amendment legitimates monopolisation of public opinion, and Abrams employs the Constitution to invoke a fear of censorship that both appeals to liberal notions and ignores the structure of the communications industry. In addition, the networks themselves have labelled the entire case 'frivolous'. Any confrontation with the dominant system is thus reframed as illegitimate, senseless, and absurd.

The ideological imperatives surface in the economic context of the networks. As Barry Russell Litman notes, the networks search for stability and security in order to insulate themselves against competition. 'Ideally, the networks would like to be totally integrated and self-sufficient in production of network

fare, control over creative inputs, station ownership and syndication. In this way they could control every important facet of their industry and lead the quiet life.'⁴ The control of the networks is evidenced most clearly in their affiliate agreements, which make it not only more profitable but less risky for affiliate stations to accept network programming. Litman suggests that a counter to network domination might be to make local stations bid on programmes. However, this would not guarantee the airing of controversial issues, and might in fact serve to increase the fragmentation of public discourse by breaking broadcast constituencies into isolated units, removed from national issues and consensus.

Litman also admits that networks often abandon their conservative tendencies and broadcast programmes on controversial issues. However, he does not discuss their incentive to do this, beyond the mandate from the FCC to deal with public affairs. Litman points out that local affiliates often reject controversial programming if they think it does not conform with local tastes, contending that their FCC licence requires them to programme in the public interest and to serve the interests of their immediate communities. This echoes the argument the networks use

2 Stuart Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect', in *Mass Communication and Society*, James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Wollacott, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1979, p 342.

3 Michael Massing, 'Should Public Affairs be the Networks' Private Domain?', *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June, 1980, p 35.

4 Barry Russell Litman, *The Vertical Structure of the Television Broadcasting Industry: the Coalescence of Power*, MSU Business Studies, East Lansing, 1979, p 27.

46 to justify their treatment of independent documentaries.

The problems of news production and the networks demonstrates the economics of the monopoly of information. Attempting to measure quality as a variable in television programming, Litman emphasises that the networks, as they become increasingly vertically integrated in terms of production, consequently rely less and less on innovation. Thus, for example, news programmes on the three American networks are not differentiated, either stylistically or in terms of content. This holds true also of entertainment programming. Vertical integration enhances the position of the networks with regard to programming: they control the production facilities, the distribution and the rights. This also eliminates some of the uncertainty inherent in competition.

In addition to the economic incentive, this monopolistic practice — the tendency to control all aspects of programme creation and distribution — evidences the 'self-preferential' tendency of monopolistic firms to take up their own products, for this gives them not only greater control but also enhanced prestige.⁵ Litman explains that while economic logic might assume that in a competitive situation networks would prefer higher quality products, their tendency towards self-preference nevertheless leads them to choose their own often lower quality programmes to enhance their own prestige. This also has economic effects: 'Hence, within a range of estimated quality values, a network will be maximising short run profits by preferring a lower quality, in-house product.'⁶

What are the consequences of this for independent producers? Now that the networks are operating increasingly as

commercial organisations which distribute time to sponsors and 'spot' buyers, they have relied increasingly on independent producers to supply the bulk of entertainment programming. *Broadcasting* magazine has noted that between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, advertisers and network-supplied entertainment programmes declined proportionately while packagers — firms which coordinate talent, production facilities and programme ideas under contract to a network — supplied 59% of total programming.⁷ By contrast, network news production, from which they generate much prestige, has expanded during the last 25 years. News shows have increased in running time from 15 minutes to their current 30 minutes, for example. The ability of television to broadcast live (the assassination of John F Kennedy and the landing on the moon are but two obvious examples) depends on national distribution systems, highly developed technological facilities, financial resources and access to satellites. Such resources constitute a substantial barrier to entry for independent producers who want to compete in the field of news. Litman sums up the consequences: 'The decision to prefer one's own product is a decision to exclude other ideas and thoughts from the marketplace of ideas and to artificially influence the outcome of such competition.'⁸ Independent producers have flourished in the entertainment field because the creation of entertainment programmes is considered a financially risky venture by the vertically integrated networks, while independently produced documentaries have had to deal with

5 *ibid*, pp 115-135.

6 *ibid*, pp. 116-117.

7 'Who'll Take New Program Risks', *Broadcasting*, February 15, 1965, p 29.

8 Litman, *op cit*, p 132.

the demands of network prestige, FCC regulations, and technology in order to secure entry.

The television networks' attitude towards their own documentary production fluctuates, however. In *Documentary in American Television*, William Bluem asserts that television opened new horizons for the documentary film, which, as cinema, had been ravaged by small audiences, no money and lack of distribution. Television, he contends, provided documentaries with both money and audiences.⁹ While he does not deal directly with the problem of independent documentary producers, he does observe that television and the documentary seem particularly suited to each other: the intimacy of television, he suggests, combines with the 'objectivity' of journalism to produce probing treatments of current events. He cites as an example of the power of television documentary the contributions of Edward R Murrow and his *See It Now* series, in which Senator Joe McCarthy's redbaiting was exposed.

However, television documentaries are not as exempt from commercial pressures as Bluem would appear to suggest. Even though the networks enjoy the prestige of their news units, the ephemeral quality of spot news reporting and its aura of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' have kept the networks insulated from more obvious ideological positions or valuations of the events reported. The evening news masks its own class and ideological positions with its supposedly ideologically neutral standards of efficiency, competition and professionalism. Herbert Gans' study on the operations of network news supports this. Gans contends, for instance, that the ideology of rationality and efficiency influences news decisions more than

ruling class ideology as such.¹⁰ Thus, unlike documentaries, which may sometimes be seen to speak from particular positions, news appears to be 'value free'.

Les Brown points out that documentaries, with their controversial topics and traditionally low audience ratings, can be commercial suicide for networks. 'Good documentaries were bad business for broadcast companies that had allowed themselves to become extensions of the advertising industry and had no insulation from the petty political purposes of legislators and governors, who could retaliate in a number of different ways.'¹¹ Sponsors withdrew from some controversial programmes. For example, Coca-Cola refused to sponsor *Migrant*, a documentary film which investigated migrant workers' conditions in Florida; and ABC, in seeking production funds, allowed 3M, B F Goodrich, and North American Rockwell determine what would be shot. Economically speaking, the main difference between documentary films and the evening news is that the former require longer preparation times and incur higher travel expenses with, more often than not, low returns on initial investment.

However, the networks have on occasion bought independently produced material, often when caught between

9 William Bluem, *Documentary in American Television*, Hastings House, New York, 1965, p 7.

10 Herbert J Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, Random House, New York, 1980, especially Ch 6 'Objectivity, Values and Ideology', pp 182-213.

11 Les Brown, 'Sponsors and Documentaries', in *The Commercial Connection*, edited by John W Wright, Dell Publishing, New York, 1979, p 266.

48 the federal government, scandal and the public. The Quiz Show scandals of the late 1950s, for example, provoked controversy around sponsors' domination of network programming. After Charles Van Doren confessed to rigging the game show *Twenty-One*, the networks launched a series of public affairs shows to regain their prestige and to comply with the new FCC ruling requiring public affairs programming.

ABC, long regarded as the weakest and least prestigious American network, lacked the news staffs and resources to move into documentary production itself, and so in 1960 purchased the first independently produced documentary film to be shown on commercial TV. The film was Robert Drew's *Yanki No!*, a study of communism in the third world, which was broadcast in the network's *Close Up* series. The vice president in charge of news programming, John C. Daly, a former host of the quiz show *What's My Line*, resigned on discovering that ABC had purchased the film, arguing that the networks must retain control over all stages of production of news since, under FCC regulation, they were liable and responsible for their programming. But the broadcast of *Yanki No!* raised broader issues than the survival of network prestige.

Following the broadcast, a *New York Daily News* piece explained the impact of the Drew film:

Both men (Daly and CBS's Sig Mickelson) in essence agreed that because of the licensing conditions under which broadcasting stations operate, the networks must exercise considerably more care in fulfilling their obligation to the public . . . While it is true that law makes no distinction between inside and outside packages, Mickelson pointed out, it's generally advisable to produce inside

*the shop since we must know what's going on the air . . . It's inconsistent with a different responsibility to buy a ready made package.*¹²

The broadcast of *Yanki No!* and resignation of Daly from the ABC staff spearheaded the debate between independent producers, who argued that the networks should purchase programming from them, and networks, who feared increased government regulation and preferred the safe path of total control.

The *Yanki No!* broadcast also affected the actual form of TV documentaries. Many historians of documentary cinema have emphasised the contribution of *cinéma vérité*. Portable sound equipment and lighter weight 16mm cameras enabled film-makers like Drew, Pennebaker and the Maysles to photograph their subjects intimately, without voice-over narration or manipulation of the pro-filmic event. The outside producers not only took up the slack of documentary production, but innovated a distinctive style of moving camera — the hand-held camera that explored events. The influence of this moving camera style, which did not differentiate between the subjectivity of the camera operator and the events happening around him or her persists to this day.

The hand-held moving camera became associated with documentary realism:

Vérité establishes its claim to television in the reality program. As a 'school' it assumes at the outset that the camera is the only real reporter and must not be subservient to script, to preconceived

12 Kay Gardella, 'Outside News Packages Important — Daly-ABC Issue, *New York Daily News*, November 11, 1960, p 84.

*thematic statement, to plotted narrative, to someone's idea of a story — to anything, in fact, but the chronological unfolding of events. The vérité thesis and the difficulties which it posed for the Video News Documentary was demonstrated in the early Drew productions for Close-Up (ABC's documentary series of the early sixties).*¹³

The question of the place of the camera in *cinéma vérité* — a combination of empirical observer and sympathetic chronicler — and the relation between documentary and narrativity are still the subject of theoretical debate. In this particular case, however, the point is that a significant shift in codes of documentary was precipitated from outside. Moreover, since *vérité* films only needed a crew of two people, they collapsed the vertical structure of TV documentary production. The camera operator could be producer, director, scriptwriter, and lighting designer.

The *Close-Up* series was ABC's self-protective response to the Quiz Show scandals. As early as the Spring of 1960, Leonard Goldenson, president of ABC, contacted Bell and Howell, the amateur movie camera manufacturer and business machine distributor, about the possibility of sponsoring some innovative documentaries. Bell and Howell had already established a reputation for supporting public affairs programming: they had sponsored the CBS report *Who Speaks for the South*, a programme on race relations, Howard K Smith's *Population Explosion*, on birth control, and an NBC documentary on the Berlin crisis. All these programmes sparked off controversy. The ABC deal 'suggested that they [Bell and Howell] would buy time in the evening for spirited public affairs programmes, give the

network an absolutely free hand in choice of content, and waive any pre-broadcast censorship, if the network would share the risk by picking up part of the programme cost.¹⁴

But Bell and Howell's motives were perhaps not as pure as they might seem. Market studies had shown that Bell and Howell's potential home movie customers watched only 'serious' television. Bell and Howell consequently reasoned that they could reach their target market more efficiently with high quality public affairs programming. In addition, the 'educational' nature of these proposed programmes would appeal to people in the school audio-visual business, which represented a substantial market for Bell and Howell Filmosound projectors.

However, internal correspondence between Bell and Howell and ABC reveals that Bell and Howell press releases claiming non-interference in programming were apparently for the press only. Bell and Howell maintained the right throughout the series to suggest topics to ABC:

Bell and Howell claimed the right to reject any subject proposed by us, but did not propose the right to name subject matters. They said that it was desirable to include international questions and not only domestic matters. Agency and client said that their major objective is to have controversial programmes that will arouse as well as inform the viewing public, and that they would not seek to dictate subject matter

¹³ Bluem, pp 97-123.

¹⁴ Robert Lewis Shayon, 'Mr Percy's Torch for TV', undated article in *Saturday Review*, John C Daly Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

50 or treatment but only to press the overall consideration of gaining the greatest amount of impact in a season when the other networks are also going in heavily for public service shows.¹⁵ [my emphasis]

Clearly, Bell and Howell wanted identification with 'international' topics in order to strengthen their connection with education. Furthermore, the company was at this time expanding its manufacturing base into Europe and the Third World. ABC did not have free rein over programme content, although they did maintain control over actual production. Thus Bell and Howell, rather than the networks, defined the parameters of discussions in these documentaries.

Bell and Howell intervened also with regard to the form of the films. For example, one documentary was to deal with the Haitian crisis, and ABC news executives hired freelance camera operators to film some interviews in Haiti. The crew encountered lighting problems, and the resulting footage was not considered up to network standards. Bell and Howell's response to the rushes reveals its motives for sponsoring such a documentary series:

You will remember how much we stressed, in our initial negotiations, the quality of the photography itself. I hope you can appreciate why our quality position in the photographic business demands that we get nothing but the best in this respect. In the Haiti show, our people were concerned about the fact that some of the pix did not seem in sharp focus, pix that did not have this illusory but important thing called excitement, and film footage that was not integrated with music and sound effects

*in a professional manner as we would hope.*¹⁶ [my emphasis]

Bell and Howell, it should be remembered, had supplied professional cameras, printers, and perforators to Hollywood since 1910, and had built up a reputation for precision, high quality engineering.

One of the major points of tension between ABC and Bell and Howell relates directly to independent producers. Bell and Howell complained that ABC had, by hiring outside executive producers, failed to fulfil its part of the agreement. ABC countered that John C Daly had been scheduled to fill that role. To placate Bell and Howell, John Daly then made an in-house closed-circuit programme for Bell and Howell explaining the series and how it would enhance the position of Bell and Howell in the photographic community.¹⁷

When John Daly discovered that ABC had contracted with Time Inc and the Drew unit to co-produce four *cinéma vérité* films for the *Close-Up* series without his prior consent, he resigned. Daly argued that the network must exercise total control over every phase of documentary production. Earlier that year, Daly had rejected David Wolper's independently produced *Race for Space*, which was eventually syndicated quite

15 ABC Memo from Bert Briller to William Mullen, 8 August, 1960, John C Daly Papers.

16 Undated Memo from Peter Peterson of Bell and Howell to Oliver Treyz of ABC, John C Daly Papers.

17 Sherman A Dryer Productions letter to Leonard Goldenson, 9 August, 1960, John C Daly Papers; ABC Memo from John C Daly to Leonard Goldenson, 11 August, 1960, John C Daly Papers; ABC Memo from Thomas Velotts to John C Daly, 11 August, 1960, John C Daly Papers.

successfully. As Daly noted in his resignation letter, the editorial differences between himself and ABC had come to a head:

*As you know, this notification is motivated by the fundamental differences on policy between us, recently reaffirmed in matters affecting the political campaigns, election night reports and the Bell and Howell Close-Up series.*¹⁸

ABC had preempted some presidential campaign and election night coverage in order to air entertainment shows, and Daly had vigorously complained.

ABC press releases indicate that the network understood the nature of the controversy over editorial control of outside products. The releases state that 'the idea for *Yanki No!* was entirely ABC's, and from the outset ABC has had complete creative and editorial control over production of this programme'.¹⁹ Goldenson claimed that ABC had pioneered the new documentary technique of 'candid moving camera', even though Robert Drew and his associates had been experimenting with the technique for several years. The project, according to Goldenson, was not a case of purchasing a totally finished product, but the result of a co-production agreement between Time Inc and ABC.

During the years between 1960 and 1963, the production of documentary films was encouraged at the networks, largely through the interventions of FCC commissioner Newton Minow and President John Kennedy. In the twenty years since the broadcast of *Yanki No!*, however, there have been no significant changes in network policy towards independently produced documentaries.

By 1965, David Wolper had purchased the Paramount newsreel library and was himself producing documentaries.

His 'independent production unit' was in essence a large firm, with more commercial motives than politically oppositional intent. While Wolper did not oppose the networks' desire for editorial control (unlike most independents, he was an entrepreneur first and foremost), he did vehemently disagree with their exclusionary practice towards independently produced documentaries. Wolper's strategy for dealing with this was to syndicate programmes: he bypassed selling them to the network (which would then transmit them to affiliates): instead, he sold directly to individual stations. Despite the fact that public affairs was the traditional 'poverty zone' of network production, 1965 was prosperous for all public affairs units, and Wolper took advantage of this. Of seventeen CBS specials, six were produced in conjunction with Wolper. *Variety* pointed out that at this time corporate profits were surging in the economy at large, and documentaries were considered 'blue chip buys'. However, controversy was numbed: 'that they don't significantly necessarily hanker for controversy is evident from all but maybe one or two of the buys already made. The "gut" stuff continues to be nixed, which is why the webs [networks] continue to hug that middle road'.²⁰

However, news specials still represented less than five per cent of all network programming.²¹ It is not hard

18 John C Daly resignation letter to Leonard Goldenson, 15 November, 1960, John C Daly Papers.

19 ABC Press Information, Undated, John C Daly Papers.

20 Jack Pitman, 'Bull Market in Public Affairs Specials', *Variety*, October 6, 1965, p 40.

21 Bill Greeley, 'Vanishing TV Doc: ETV Produces more than Webs', *Variety*, October 6, 1965, pp 35 and 51.

52 to see why independent producers had difficulty gaining air time: low ratings, lack of sponsors for controversial broadcasts, little pressure from the FCC and overexposure contributed to this low figure. Documentaries, even when they did appear, were frequently characterised as 'no guts journalism'. Sponsors began to influence the content of documentaries: David Wolper, for example, allowed the president of the Manhattan Fund to preview a film about Wall Street sponsored by Xerox, in which the Fund had large holdings, and Hughes Aircraft sponsored a documentary about its own Surveyor unmanned rocket.²² Since NBC and CBS did not allow sponsors the right to preview the scripts of sponsored documentaries, many sponsoring corporations consequently turned to Wolper. Thus, independent producers who, like Wolper, claimed they were showmen rather than journalists, provided space for the exercise of corporate censorship. If the films could be sold to the networks or successfully syndicated, independent products allowed corporate interests more direct control in public affairs debates.

Every time the networks did deal with independents — whether 'entrepreneurial' or 'oppositional' — conflict ensued. Independent producers contended that their journalistic technique was more bold because they were not tied to the corporate ladder within network bureaucracies. When NBC finally went to an outside producer, it was to Rossellini, an Italian, to shoot a film about Sicily. And when Emile de Antonio entered into a 50-50 partnership with CBS in 1967 to produce a film about the Kennedy assassination, he was told that over seventy hours of CBS news outtakes of the assassination that he had previously screened had

been destroyed. CBS did not broadcast controversial programming about North Vietnam obtained from a British journalist in 1967. The network had provided Felix Green with money, raw stock and processing, but the film, *Inside North Vietnam*, was subsequently shown only in American movie theatres and on the Public Broadcasting System. Clearly, independent documentaries created conflicts, not so much because of fear on the part of the networks that the FCC would revoke their licences, but because of their conservative, self-preferential tendencies.

After 1968, the status of broadcast documentary deteriorated even further. Soft, entertaining pieces were easier to sell to sponsors and were cheaper to produce, since they required less preparation time in research and shooting. By 1969, NBC staff documentary producers 'were sitting around doing nothing', and ABC refused to produce a news special until it was sold to a sponsor.²³ The networks' claim to editorial control translated more accurately into cost effectiveness. The end result was that the corporations exerted covert pressure on both content and presentation. At ABC, for example, sponsors even made changes in finished films.²⁴

If independently produced documentaries were anathema, even network-produced documentaries

22 Bill Greeley, 'Cozy Sponsors Giving CBS News Teleumentaries Looks of Industrials', *Variety*, June 22, 1966, p 45.

23 Bill Greeley, 'Ducking the Documentary', *Variety*, May 14, 1969, pp 43 and 60. Also see Jack Pitman, 'Documentary in Downdraft', *Variety*, May 22, 1968, pp 31 and 48.

24 Steve Knoll, 'Sponsor Rules in ABC Documentaries', *Variety*, September 3, 1969, pp 33 and 48.

suffered from ideological constraints and financial limitations. Sponsors complained that new techniques, such as *cinéma vérité* which required small crews, insulated producers from sponsor intervention. The sponsors preferred an industrial type division of labour which would be more easily controlled, and which would effectively defuse editorialising on the part of film-makers:

There is a smaller 'engineering' team than in entertainment and there is more of a point of view behind where the camera is pointed. There is also an increasing degree of creativity or what Tom Wolfe calls 'mood', as the technique moves away from head and mouth shots to artistic camerawork.²⁵

Sponsors complained that the difficulty with the documentary form was the impossibility of predicting how it would turn out—another value of capitalist commodity production. Citing the Catch-22 that documentaries could not get on the air without a sponsor, while once they got a sponsor they were reduced to blandness, some critics called for more regulation from the Federal Communications Commission.

The networks responded to this dilemma by instituting magazine format shows such as CBS's *60 Minutes*: such shows continue to flourish in various forms today. Network executives considered magazine and news shows more saleable because of the unpredictability of the next day's news. The demise of the network documentary has been succinctly explained by Steve Knoll in *Variety*:

The documentary, potentially the most powerful tool of TV journalism, is being

used sparingly because of cash register realities. The growth of programs which treat complex stories in capsule form and reflect a 'featurish' approach cannot obscure that fact.²⁶

Independently produced documentaries will continue to be excluded from network programming until the networks themselves are restructured. Their fiscal conservatism, their tendency to self-preference, and their fear of losing sponsor revenues, not only limit the quantity and quality of network documentaries, but also pose a significant barrier to entry for independent products. Independent films like *Yanki No!* not only bring oppositional ideologies into play, but can also be formally innovative. If the networks are in a competitive situation and are at the same time unable to produce their own material, as was the case with ABC in the early 1960s, then they are likely to seek independent products. Jon Alpert's coverage of events in Iran in the Autumn of 1980 is a good example of this process in action. He provided independently-produced pieces for the evening news after Iran demanded that American journalists leave the country. However, this was obviously an exceptional situation: it is doubtful that the networks will relinquish the prestige they derive from their own news operations—virtually their only area of production—unless federal regulations or anti-trust proceedings rule otherwise.

25 Paul M Roth, 'The Trouble with Documentary TV From a Sponsor's Point of View', *Variety*, September 16, 1970, p 32.

26 Steve Knoll, 'Sponsor Aversion Maid Roadblock on TV Documentary's Comeback Trail', *Variety*, December 24, 1969, pp 26 and 32.

CLAIRE JOHNSTON

'MAEVE'

There is no autonomous women's movement in the North of Ireland at the present time: the dichotomy between immediate needs and long-term objectives within the context of 'the troubles' and the deepening crisis of the Northern Irish state has so far paralysed attempts to build such a movement. The general consensus within the republican movement is that specifically feminist issues should be postponed until more favourable conditions emerge. Recently such assumptions have been challenged by women's groups and the frequently uncritical support which English feminists have given the republican movement:

The uncritical support given by some English feminists to the nationalist struggle being waged here in Northern Ireland is of little help to us, or indeed, to the women in the whole of Ireland. Not only does it serve to divide women along the traditional 'Orange and Green', it also results in a lack of attention to the feminist issues. The ability of English feminists to concentrate on the national liberation struggle is a luxury we can't afford.

Statement by Derry Women's Aid in Spare Rib no 99 November 1980.

Similarly, writing about their work in Belfast over the past few years, the Belfast Women's Collective describe their isolation from the mainstream of republicanism:

The problems was this — all the women within the group were agreed on their opposition to British imperialism, but we made

cogent criticisms of the Republican movement, particularly of its position on women. We showed how women had been used and forgotten in previous struggles in Ireland, to demonstrate the dangers of history repeating itself. We acknowledged the importance of the national question (the campaign for a united Ireland) but stressed that it should not and could not be put before other questions — there could be no liberation without women's liberation — and unless struggle was carried out on all fronts then the 'revolution' was likely to bring little real change to women's lives.

Statement by the Belfast Women's Collective, *Spare Rib* op cit.

Maeve is a film which both reflects these debates within feminism and makes its own unique contribution to them. The narrative tells the story of a young woman, Maeve, who has been living in London and returns to her home in a catholic ghetto of Belfast on a visit. The fundamental motor for the unfolding of the narrative, as it is for a significant aspect of feminist art practice and for Pat Murphy's previous film *Rituals of Memory* (1979), is the exploration of personal memory. The film juxtaposes the present of her visit to her family and friends with the past of the subjective memories of her childhood and adolescence in Belfast, of her trips with her father out into the countryside, of the move from a protestant housing estate to a catholic ghetto as 'the troubles' escalate, and of her relationship with Liam, a young republican and their final estrangement.

In recent years feminist film theory and practice have pointed to the need to re-assess the role of a prescriptive 'anti-realism' which ignores the central question for a politics of cinema — that of the audience defined in social and historical terms. Such a re-assessment must necessarily involve a move away from the notion of 'text' and 'spectator' conceptualised in abstract and a-historical terms and towards a more interventionist conception of textual practice seen within specific historical conjunctures, where formalist criteria for assessing whether a film is 'progressive' or 'reactionary' are secondarised. It is in this context that *Maeve* should be assessed.

Like much feminist film-making of the last decade, *Maeve* has an experimental narrative structure, which works within and against the operations of the classic narrative *vis-à-vis* the spectator. The difference and the originality of the film is the way in which these narrative strategies structure the terms of the political debate the film sets up between feminism and republicanism. The film poses its critique of republicanism in the figure of

Maeve, who enters the narrative from the outside as an exile. Maeve describes men's relationship to women within nationalist culture as 'like England's relationship to Ireland. You're in possession of us. You occupy us like an army. She rejects the role women have traditionally been allowed within the nationalist struggle: 'When you're denied power, or when it's continually co-opted, the only form of protest is through your body. Our struggle is for autonomy'. Maeve represents women's negative relationship to language and the symbolic order of patriarchal nationalist culture — the outside of republican discourse. This negative positionality is embedded in the process of the film itself, and in the interaction of the narrative discourses of past and present which the film sets up. The film rejects the notion of a 'positive heroine', but at the same time attempts to create the possibility of positive images *for* women, an imaginary *for* women, which would enable them to enter history on their own terms, through the mobilisation rather than the undercutting of identification processes.

The dominant discourse of the film is the story in the present which, in its sense of documentary immediacy and realism, sets up the possibility of providing the 'reality' of the experience of the

Martin Sweeney's stories . . .



nationalist community. Within this narrative discourse, Maeve remains an outsider, a witness to the stories her family relate to her, the subject of incomprehension. The immediacy of the political situation renders her discourse meaningless and identification with her position difficult. At the same time, the film stresses the fictionalisation of these experiences, both through the process of storytelling through the way in which TV is seen to mediate that reality within the family and encapsulated in the orange march on July 12, which the family watch on TV as it passes their window in the street outside. If the working through of the dominant narrative discourse serves to re-produce Maeve as exile, the narrative discourse of her subjective memory told in flashback from her point-of-view produces the opposite effect and operates to provide an understanding of that isolation and sense of exclusion. Unlike her father's memory which serves to hold him to a past and prevent him from acting in the present, Maeve's reactivation of the past traces her political development as a feminist and provides an understanding of the present and her position within it, and through its articulation as subjective point-of-view, demanding the spectator's identification with it. If the dominant discourse works to naturalise nationalist ideologies and culture, the feminine discourse works to de-naturalise it, producing a space which must be filled, a problem of identity and position in the text.

Maeve's father, Martin Sweeney, is positioned in the narrative to inhabit this space. The opening scene sets him up to function as the *seannochoi*, the traditional Irish storyteller, whose position of knowledge within the narrative traditionally functions as the collective memory of the community, as he sits down at the table in the middle of a bomb scare and writes a letter to his daughter. But Martin's stories mirror his dislocation from society and remain locked in a heroic myth of the past. Through his stories he seeks to both control and distance himself from the realities of the world in which he lives. At key points in the narrative he addresses the audience directly, initially by interrupting Eileen, Maeve's mother, and taking the story she is about to tell Maeve away from her and asserting a privileged relationship to the camera by addressing the camera directly. Martin asserts his patriarchal discourse as universal, but as the film progresses it increasingly serves the function of a monologue and the position of knowledge which it seeks to hold within the narrative is undermined as Maeve retreats from his sphere of influence. The final shot of the film is of him talking to himself and looking out of frame, the privileged relation-

ship of his discourse with the audience having been finally undermined. The storyteller finally loses control of the story: he can no longer hold together the problem of identity and of position within the film.

The film is not only interpolated by Martin Sweeney's stories but by a series of dialogues between Maeve and Liam where the realist conception of character within the narrative is abandoned and they come to represent elements within an intellectual argument between feminism and republicanism. These dialogues function as a counterpoint to Martin Sweeney's stories and concretise the contradictions set up between the narratives of past and present as overtly political discourses in struggle. Liam rejects the republican tradition of his father's generation and is searching for a more progressive form of politics which can break with the myths of the past and act upon the present. At the same time he can see no place for feminism as an autonomous force within the nationalist struggle and sees Maeve's ideas as simply the products of a self-imposed exile and fundamentally depoliticising. The relationship of sound to image traces a progression from Maeve as voice-off on Cave Hill towards a greater centralising for her position in the sequence in Clifton Graveyard, but they remain at an impasse, as discourses in struggle filmed in long-shot.

An important aspect of the film is the way in which it depicts the construction of 'femininity' within nationalist culture, encapsulated in the memory sequence in the convent schoolroom where

The convent — the girls recite 'The Mother'



the girls are forced to recite by rote Patrick's Pearce's famous poem 'The Mother' written just before his execution after the Easter Rising in 1916 in which he associates the mother of an Irish nationalist with the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross. Pearce's poem has become one of the cornerstones of the nationalist imaginary of women, invoking the necessity for blood sacrifice and martyrdom for a mythological notion of Ireland as the maternal, addressing her children in the name of God and dead generations to sacrifice themselves for her nationhood and for the mythical re-birth of the lost Spirit of Eire, the eternal 'nation'. In contrast to Maeve, Eileen and Roisin represent two generations of women caught in these representations of women, at the same time offering their own particular stoical and circumscribed resistances to them. They operate within a realist conception of character within the narrative to assert a marginalised and specifically female experience of the political situation (eg sexual harassment by the security forces etc) which, through reminiscence and anecdote, serves to undercut the heroics of the father's discourse. While Maeve's feminism remains irrelevant to their immediate experience the film nevertheless, at the level of the image, through composition within the frame, conveys an intimate bond between the women which transcends the differences of generation and experience.

Maeve works towards a displacement of this nationalist imaginary of women and the construction of another imaginary — an imaginary *for* women which could, at the level of phantasy, produce a centrality for Maeve's discourse which the structure of the narrative disallows. To produce this the film invokes the landscape, which throughout the film has functioned either as a male domain (eg in Maeve's memories of her trips into the countryside with her father and in Liam's relationship to landscape and frame — the land as the central metaphor for generations of republican men) or as the repository of a 'Celtic' truth which lies beyond history and politics (eg epitomised in the Seeker of Lost Knowledge). The resolution and closure of the narrative on the Giant's Causeway depicts Maeve, Roisin and Eileen united together for the first time in the film within the image. The scene assumes the level of subversive phantasy as the demonic Causeway Man rants his mad cultural pastiche of Irish patriarchal discourse. While the women shelter under the rocks and take a swig from a bottle of whiskey, his voice-off continues to drone its empty rhetoric of blood sacrifice, 'freedom' and 'manhood'. Their final images offer a resolution and closure in terms of a displacement of the nationalist



Maeve, Eileen and Roisin on the Giant's Causeway

patriarchal mythology of the land and assert the need for women to reappropriate that mythology for history. If the film depicts the discourses of feminism and republicanism at an impasse, as discourses in struggle, through the dialogues of Maeve and Liam, the final images suggest a struggle within nationalist mythologies of the land on which those discourses rest, and a militant reactivation of Eire as the 'feminine', such a representation displacing the dominant nationalist ideologies which place that 'feminine' exclusively within the confines of the 'maternal' and outside history. It is a concept of the 'feminine' which draws upon Celtic mythology but is also worked through in the process of the film itself and in the representations of Eileen, Roisin and Maeve. The immense emotive power of these final images foreground the fundamental problem of cinema and images of women — the problem of how to move against the language of the cinema and the imaginary of women which underlies it to produce new meanings — another imaginary — while running the risk of identifying women with what is archaic, pre-historic — the radical 'outside' of language. It could be argued that *Maeve*, in its invocation of Celtic myth, risks precisely this essentialism, undercutting its project of placing feminism as a central issue for history: the film moves towards an essentialism both of 'woman' and of 'nation'. However, what cannot be ignored is that such an essentialism possesses a mobilising power which is crucial for the feminist politics for which the film is calling.

The intervention *Maeve* is making is bound to be problematic in the present political conjuncture.¹ Clearly, in terms of the left and the women's movement in England in the context of the policy of the British state to isolate nationalism, destroy it as a movement and treat it as a simple problem of crime control, the film raises questions concerning the uncritical support given by feminists and the left to the republican struggle and the implications this has for women from within that struggle. At the same time, in the context of Ireland, certain problems emerge. The intervention *Maeve* is making has to be seen within the dominant culture of the island of Ireland as defined by nationalism and catholicism, the dominant culture hegemonised within the Southern State and the minority, subordinate culture in the North — a culture which has become almost totally synonymous with the term 'Irish Culture'. In the context of the North, in terms of the minority population, the intervention it is making reflects the debates which feminists have begun to initiate. However, within the bourgeois success story that is the Southern State where class contradictions are becoming more dominant, other problems present themselves, and are reflected in the move away from the concept of nation to that of class by such organisations as *Sinn Féin* — The Workers Party. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the critique of nationalism and the role of the Church has been mounted as much by the right as by the left, which has, in its turn, affected the politics of the Women's Movement. For instance, the internalisation of European politics within the Southern State raises the question as to how relevant republican ideologies remain for women, Eire's membership of the EEC is increasingly seen to be important for feminists and gay groups in that it opens up the possibility of challenging the State's internalisation of specifically Catholic ideologies of the family and sexuality within the Constitution of 1937. *Maeve* argues for a reworking of the republican tradition, but it is unclear to what extent Liam's discourse engages with the question of class, or simply reflects the dominant republican tradition founded on a producers' 'socialism' on the lines of Arab and African 'socialism'. There is, of course, the 'other scene' of 'Irish culture', a subordinate culture within the context of the island of Ireland, a culture which has developed historically as a profoundly stunted and defensive tradition, hegemonised within the colonial framework of the Northern Irish State, usually identified as Protestant/Unionist. It would be, perhaps, pure fantasy to envisage the film making an intervention within such a context in the present crisis, and yet it has pre-

1 For further reading see *Ireland, Divided Nation, Divided Class*, Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (eds), Ink Links, London, 1980.

2 Wolfe Tone was founder of the Society of United Irishmen in 1791 which aimed at establishing Ireland as a Republic along the lines of the French model. He was a protestant and a democrat and worked closely with catholic organisations.

3 See Kevin Rockett 'Film Culture in Ireland', *Screen Education*, no 27, Summer, 1978.

4 Very little work has been undertaken in this area as yet, but it is interesting to note that within the visual arts, it was largely women artists who were influenced by the impact of cubism.

5 See Kevin Rockett, 'Irish Cinema: Notes on Some Nationalist Fictions', *Screen*, vol 20, nos 3/4, 1979/80.

cisely been feminists in Ireland who have done most to identify religious ideologies as a major locus of patriarchal power (eg in abortion and contraception campaigns etc). *Maeve's* only reference to protestant women occurs in the memory sequence at the hospital where an old women comforts Maeve by singing 'Abide With Me', her 'otherness' underlined through Maeve's point-of-view. But the film's use of place as a signifier of memory and history points to the possibility of a republicanism which is non-sectarian, a return to the tradition of Wolf Tone² — the scene of the first political dialogue between Liam and Maeve takes place on Cave Hill, the scene of the famous oath taken by Tone and others in 1795 to rid Ireland of the English. In this sense the film raises the question as to the role of feminism in undermining religious ideologies and opening up the possibility of alliances between women along non-sectarian lines as a way forward.

Finally, it should be emphasised the extent to which in both its textual strategies and in its interrogation of the ways in which patriarchal ideologies lie deeply embedded in the very conceptions of national culture, *Maeve* constitutes an important contribution to the development of that emerging and problematic entity 'Irish Film Culture'. One major problem which has been identified for film theory and practice³ in Ireland has been the weakness of visual⁴ as opposed to literary culture and the way in which modernism has had very little impact on the culture itself, despite the legacy of Joyce. Strategies for ideological struggle within the context of Ireland can neither simply consist of an application of the British model nor from formalist prescriptions of the 'modernist text' outside any analysis of the cultural formation and the analysis of the counter-hegemonic and radical potential within it. A central feature of Irish national culture is precisely its populist basis which distinguishes it sharply from its British counterpart, where ideologies of 'high' and 'popular' culture are more entrenched. Similarly, the idea of the 'literary' functions vary differently within the Irish cultural formation, possessing far more radical elements. *Maeve's* emphasis on language reflects this concern, and with it the possibility of developing the 'popular' as a radical concept along Brechtian lines. In recent years there has been a 'new wave' of Irish film-making⁵ which has begun to question the construction of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' within the national culture, with films like Tom McArdle's *The Kinkisha* (1978) and Kieran Hickey's *Exposure* (1977) and *Criminal Conversation* (1980). *Exposure* in particular,

parallels many of the concerns of *Maeve* in its exploration of the exclusivity of the all-male group and the threat which a woman represents who enters the narrative from the outside. At the same time, textual practices have begun to develop which mark a move away from the dominant classic realist aesthetic: *The Lament of Art O'Leary* (dir Bob Quinn, 1974) with its exploration of a narrative structure based on the *aoinead* or lament and *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (dir Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1979) with its reworking of the documentary genre within a fragmented narrative structure. *Maeve*, however, is the first feminist intervention within this 'new wave' of Irish film-making, and in a wider cultural context in which women have largely remained invisible.

'Maeve' — Credits

Directors: Pat Murphy, John Davies; **Screenplay:** Pat Murphy; **Photography** (Fujicolor): Robert Smith; **Editor:** John Davies; **Music:** Molly Brambeld and the Country Four; **Sound:** Chris Renty; **Leading players:** Mary Jackson, Mark Mulholland, Brid Brennan, Trudy Kelly, John Keegan, Nuala McCann, George Shane, Aingeal Greghan; **Running Time:** 110 mins; **Production:** British Film Institute in association with Radio Telefis Eireann.

Interview with Pat Murphy

CJ Could we begin by talking about your approach to making a film about Northern Ireland in the present political conjuncture?

PM In the films that John Davies and I have made individually, we worked with the notion of narrative as a function of place, so the approach to making *Maeve* was an extension of those interests and, in addition, we both were dissatisfied with documentary films about Northern Ireland. I grew up watching that kind of material on TV and concluded, finally, that it was not simply a question of anti-Irish bias and censorship, it was a problem inherent in a kind of documentary form which has a notion of objective truth and which uses a vocabulary of isolated images, constant climaxes, held together within the narrative authority of the voice-over. For a while I resisted basing the film inside one family, thinking that the challenge to documentary realism would be undermined by the use of another TV convention, that of the family chronicle. I was afraid of setting up a *Coronation Street* kind of identification with the characters. But as the writing went on, the tensions between these differences became an important part of the film's structure. The family was a basic unit that the film could move out of and return to.

The fictions you finally chose involve three levels — there's the discourse around the father, which at some points in the film involves a direct address to the spectator, and there's the two other discourses around Maeve's past as a child and her present in Belfast. At times the father operates as a 'talking head' in some ways, but finally his discourse doesn't hold the spectator in a position of knowledge. The narrative structure is fragmented so that Maeve's and Liam's political dialogues become increasingly important.

Martin Sweeney, the father, tells stories both as a way of controlling his situation and distancing himself from it. His 'privileged' position is derived from his investment with the role of 'storyteller' and is a reference to the Irish oral tradition. We made a decision that he should include the spectator as part of his audience. He also takes that position as the 'father'. The first story is actually the mother's, but he takes it away from her and draws the camera into a listening position in relation to him. This sets up a pattern which recurs throughout the film, because Maeve then remembers travelling with him in the countryside as a child. In a way, his stories are interferences to her. They interpret the landscape for her and deny and prevent her experiencing it for herself. Thus the accumulation of memory episodes build up to an image of her withdrawal from her father's influence — from patriarchal culture. Maeve and Liam's three abstract dialogues are, like Martin's stories, punctuations in the realistic narrative. They don't undermine Martin's stories as much as juxtapose a discursive reality, a dialectic between them, with his non-discursive one, in that he is speaking to no one.

Is memory for you a question of revealing the past or is it a re-activation of the past for the present? In terms of oral history, traumatic memory seems to have dominated conceptions of Irish culture.

Sometimes oral history participates in a kind of heroic memory, which is loss of memory, in fact — a subsumption of personal history into dream time. Personal memory involves relinquishing the kind of unity offered by heroic memory and realising that the truth can only be perceived from one point of view. It is a process of asking questions rather than accepting a closed system of images.

What you call heroic memory and I would call nationalist history has produced a kind of ideological stasis in Ireland. It seems to me

necessary to rework that memory and to challenge those ideologies at the moment.

Yes, but I get worried about the nature of that reworking. For instance, when The Workers' Party gave up the name *Sinn Féin* it was partly to do with wanting to establish itself as a labour-based organisation capable of transcending sectarian divisions. But I think relinquishing that name becomes a kind of memory block, a kind of denial of the past.

Don't you think that Irish culture is very much bound up with oral as opposed to written language?

In some of his writing Yeats tries to analyse the cultural differences between England and Ireland. He speaks of the first as a visual or spatial culture and of Ireland as being oral or time based. By the late nineteenth century England was a nation which was comfortable in its space and had developed a culture which was expressive of that security. Yeats said that in a visual culture, experience is understood as a field of reference and important events are those which change the configuration as a whole. The point of view is crucial and the fundamental question is the relationship between subject and object. But Ireland, denied that sense of security in its own space, retreated into a time-based culture, a flexible and nomadic oral tradition evolved where experience is described in terms of speech, memory and anecdote, the storyteller rather than the point-of-view structure of the novel.

Could we discuss the discourse around the present in the film which is centred around Maeve and her being an exile, having distance on the situation and going back. In the scene in the bookshop Liam describes Maeve as hiding between Joyce and Beckett, both of whom epitomise a certain kind of position taken up by Irish exiles. Did you think that it was important that her analysis of women in relation to Ireland came from the outside? The choice of exile for the Irish has always existed and there's always an ambivalence towards England because of this.

England, as the dominant culture, denies meaning to a language which doesn't re-affirm its interests. It casts Republicans as criminals and refuses to give credibility to the IRA as a coherent political group. It isolates their activities as dislocated criminal events. Within Maeve's culture, nationalism is the *status quo*, which she sees as denying her identity as a woman. She leaves in order to recreate her life outside the demands of her heritage.

But within the frame of reference defined by men and their nationalism, Maeve can only represent negativity.

Liam's politicisation of himself puts him in contact with his history, whereas Maeve's attempts to politicise herself place her outside her culture and her history, and are, within Liam's frame of reference, depoliticising. The film is very much bound up with the notion of Maeve as an exile. There's a tradition in Ireland not only of exile, of sending people out, but of return, of the re-absorption of exiles back into the culture. Republicanism itself was brought back to Ireland by exiles, in the wake of the American and French Revolutions.

But you don't choose to have the patriarchal discourse, represented by the father, identified with Republicanism. It's Liam who represents this discourse.

Liam doesn't represent an orthodox republican position. It's more specific events, atrocities like Bloody Sunday, Thatcher's intransigence over the hunger strike which would motivate someone's involvement in the IRA, rather than Liam's search for a useful position through analysing the set of beliefs which inform republicanism. The film uses a certain amount of abstraction in concentrating on his changing relationship to those beliefs. I wanted to get away from the trench-coat *Informer* image of IRA men, or the 'young terrorist manipulated by IRA godfathers' media projection. As Maeve moves beyond her father's sphere of influence, Liam represents a powerful figure in her life. She moves from resisting the way patriarchy requires her to be a daughter, to resisting the ways in which the next generation of the patriarchy requires her to be a wife. I'm talking about patriarchy in terms of successive generations of Irish men. In the dialogue at Cave Hill, Liam speaks of the differences between him and his father. He moves from an alienation from the kind of belief which had sustained his father, to a conviction that those beliefs can be mobilised in the service of a more progressive politics.

The movement from daughter to wife and then, logically, to the mother. I particularly like the scene where the schoolgirls recite Pearce's poem 'The Mother'.

The scene in the classroom shows the physical reality of the girls at odds with the mythologised image of 'woman' presented in the poem. 'The Mother' was written towards the end of Pearce's life, when he saw the Rising in 1916 as a doomed but inevitable enter-

prise, necessary in order to force a change in the course of Irish history. What comes across in the poem is not only his conviction that his self-sacrifice is required and will make sense of his life, but that it will make sense of his mother's life also. As well as projecting himself forward into his mother's grief, he offers her as comfort the notion that just as his *action* transforms him into the role of hero, so her *reaction* links her (through him) to the role of hero's mother, an archetypal image of suffering. In Ireland, all the complexities of Pearce's personality are reduced to a mythic image — the Catholic ideal of manhood, complete sexlessness — and a repudiation of femaleness apart from tragic images of a Pièta-like mother and Caitlin ni Houlihan.⁶

Could we discuss the question of male sexuality further, particularly the way nudity is represented in the film? Have women commented on this? There seems an apparent idealisation of the relationships through the representation of nudity.

The women's nakedness in the bedroom is a way of underlining the drama. It speaks of a kind of casual intimacy which is destroyed by a misunderstanding. Roisin, suddenly made self-conscious, moves away and gets dressed. Maeve is uneasy in a space which is no longer her territory. Initially, Maeve has an ease of manner with Liam which contrasts with the way she has to consciously construct that ease with her sister. I didn't choose to depict the sexual relationship between Liam and Maeve as problematic. Women commenting on the scene between Maeve and Roisin said that they understood it as an experiment in representation, but felt that the scene was undermined by the physical beauty of the women.

What was your approach to the representation of the women in the film, and of the mother, in particular?

The relationship between the women in the film is rooted entirely in the realistic sections. The sisters both support and sabotage each other. Maeve is distanced from her mother, dependent on Roisin for information about her. She views the silent complicity of their relationship as a kind of solidarity of victims. Roisin completely rejects Maeve's ideas as having nothing to do with the way she has to live. Despite their antagonism, there remains a strong and intimate connection between them. The scene on the Giant's Causeway at the end of the film is the one scene where all three women are seen together and alone in the frame. It is a kind of visual resolution of the tensions between them.

⁶ Caitlin ni Houlihan: a female figure in Irish mythology, representing the earth goddess Eire of pre-Christian Ireland. In many stories she appears disguised as an old woman and is magically transformed into a young and beautiful girl. W B Yeats celebrated her as a symbol of the Irish cause in his play of the same title produced during the Celtic Revival in 1902. In this version it is the act of blood sacrifice for the Irish cause which transforms the old woman into a young girl with the 'walk of a queen'. Ernest Jones in his essay 'The Island of Ireland' (1922) offers a psycho-analytic reading of this myth.

You put considerable emphasis on landscape in the film. Could you expand on this? There is an equation in Irish culture between women and the land.

The use of landscape is bound up with the notion of a narrative place, of landscape as evocative of narrative. The people who built the stone rings and megalithic sites were articulating the landscape in their image. Particular sites are seen as memory triggers, a system of clues you can pick up on if you desire a certain reading of the film. For instance, the Seeker of Lost Knowledge is an English academic in search of a particular notion of Celtic truth. He's not interested in going into Belfast. On the other hand, once Liam has accepted his position, the city responds to the unity of his world view. The land moves into focus, lays itself open to his potentiality. He can act effectively on time and space. Martin Sweeney's journeys are like his stories. He has a kind of romanticism about wandering freely through the land, but this is also expressive of his inability to identify with any social group, his dislocation from any functioning system of society.

You concentrate on the role of the British army and their sexual harassment of women rather than the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] or the UDR [Ulster Defence Regiment].

We didn't intend to leave out the role of the RUC and the UDR; in fact, there are a couple of scenes in the film where it's not known whether the troops are Brits or UDR men. The answer is simply that the way the film is set up, it happens that it is the British Army who are intruders in the narrative. The scenes with the security forces have to do with showing how the women in the film experience the pressure of the troops on the streets as sexual harassment as well as political occupation.

You use the metaphor of women as a class or nation.

I guess I propose it on a fantasy level, as a point of debate, a way of imagining a situation in which women would be the central model of a culture rather than being other and apart. I don't think Maeve is proposing a developed notion of women and nationhood. It is Liam who makes that definition. She asks him to use his frame of reference as a way of understanding hers. He accuses her of proposing a devious form of nationalism.

Maeve is addressed to different and heterogeneous audiences — the left and the women's movement in Britain, women in both the North and the South of Ireland and so on. What do you think

the problems are with this and what responses have there been so far?

The problem of the audience will change and go on over the years whenever the film is shown. I have been asked if the film is intended for Irish or English audiences. A lot of the material in the film is a 'given' to an Irish audience. In a sense, the film is a way of giving information on Ireland in a fictional form. An opposite view is that there are so many references in the film which operate only for an Irish audience — the hospital scene, for instance, and a certain experience of catholicism.

I feel that a discussion of women's oppression has to take place despite the war in Ireland. In terms of the film I was concerned not to make a film which eliminates contradictions for audiences like Jennifer Johnston's film for TV about the Troubles from a liberal viewpoint, *Shadows on our Skin* (BBC 1980) or from a classic propagandistic viewpoint *The Patriot Game* (Dir Arthur MacCaig, 1979): we wanted precisely to raise questions. What worries me is that critics seem to be isolating the politics of the film as 'bad film-making' and picking up on certain aspects of the realistic sequences (eg the women caught in cross-fire) as something which reinforces their notion of what life in Belfast is really like!

I would have thought that some Irish feminists might find the idea of the discourse of feminism coming from outside in the form of Maeve's exile insulting in the light of the work that they have been trying to do. The Belfast Women's Collective, for instance, has been trying to develop a critique of republicanism along vaguely similar lines to yours.

The advance of any political movement is based on the merging of ideas coming from outside with a specific situation. I think the Republican movement draws strength from its identification with the peoples of El Salvador and the Basque country. One of the themes in *Maeve* is the problem of developing a theory of feminist politics which is not applicable to Maeve's reality. Her situation as a returned exile is seen as a problem. The film provokes both identification with and criticism of the main character. It doesn't demand unequivocal support and it's certainly not intended to insult or deny the work Irish feminists have done. I think the women who saw *Maeve* in Belfast were critical of the film but realise that. It is dependent on how you see Maeve as a character. If you see her as an unproblematic heroine, a model for women's behaviour, then there is an implication that you have to leave

Ireland to become a feminist. But as I've suggested, there are other readings of her position in the narrative. There is a real divide in the Irish Women's Movement among those who deny that any attention can be paid to republicanism at all and the Women Against Imperialism position which basically says that women's liberation will be the result of a United Irish Socialist Republic. For me, the oppression of women is the fundamental oppression, but at the same time, I do see the only way forward as being through a united Ireland. The women who saw *Maeve* in Belfast identified the lack of a republican woman's voice as a problem. I felt that, in a sense, the character of Roisin fulfils that role. Her strength is such that she doesn't have to articulate herself in the way that Maeve does. She doesn't experience that kind of alienation. But I realise that that is not coming across and accept the criticism.

If women's oppression is the most fundamental oppression, what about protestant women, then? Do you exclude them from the struggle?

Maeve is very much about a catholic woman's experience. Protestant women don't come into that much so the film reflects that. Their exclusion is not a consciously sectarian act on our part. Partly because of the segregation of schools, catholic and protestant women have very little experience of each other. The work place provided a certain amount of contact, but since the Troubles intensified, women have tended to remain in their own areas. The first protestant I had a real conversation with was when I went to art college in Belfast. In order to make that contact you tend to focus on common ground rather than on differences. I think catholic and protestant women retain a kind of fantasy about the way the other lives. This is shown in the night time hospital scene in *Maeve*. There is an oddness, a kind of exoticism about the meeting between Maeve and the old woman. The question is really one of the film's identification of progressive forces within feminism and republicanism as the way forward and whether that implies that protestant women would be excluded while catholic women would have a privileged position in the 'New Ireland' by right of birth. Republicanism is not a monolithic set of given ideas. Catholic women are having to fight for their place within it. It's not for me to explain or colonise protestant women's experience, it is for them to work beyond their own mythology and analyse their own relationship to Republicanism.

What has been the audience response to the way the film works both for and against traditional identification processes?

The structure of the film denies a certain homogeneity which allows the audience to experience uncertainty. Contradictions are set up which are not resolved in the narrative. Some people are confused by the shift from realistic drama to abstract dialogue. They feel that the dialogue should be more embedded in the drama or that it should be resolved through a more easily recognisable technique of distanciation. We resisted doing that because that strategy would leave both of those structures intact. We were interested in the point of transition — where the audience response to an incoming scene is a leftover reading from the outgoing scene. Maybe it's to do with the oral culture idea, but while there was a lot of debate around the content of those dialogues, I didn't find that audiences in Ireland found the changes in representation to be so problematic.

That's interesting. I feel that the division in British culture between 'popular' and 'high' culture really doesn't apply in the case of Ireland — there's a far greater populist tradition and this has implications for any movement to develop any radical art practice in relation to audiences — you can't just attempt to apply the British model.

I think that's true at a cultural level and, anyway, Ireland doesn't have an economy which could sustain the separations that exist in Britain in the Independent Film Movement.

To go back to the question of identification. Are you saying that you think points of identification are important for a political cinema as long as they don't hold the spectator to meaning totally?

The strategies used in *Maeve* relate principally to this film and don't particularly represent a definitive theory of what constitutes a political cinema. The script I'm working on now is based on the prison journals of Anne Devlin — who is remembered as Robert Emmet's⁷ servant and helped him set up but didn't take part in, the Rebellion of 1803 — is also a political film. It progresses in a single narrative line and is not episodic or accumulative in the way information is put together in *Maeve*. It will have more of a ballad-like structure. The script identifies very much with Anne Devlin's point of view: her interrogators attempt to undermine her memory by perverting her version of what happened; a tension develops between her need to deny her memory to avoid execution, but at the same time, holding onto it as a technique of survival.

⁷ Robert Emmet: Republican leader and martyr who, in the aftermath of the United Irishmen movement, led an attempted insurrection after the Act of Union in 1801 which united the parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland.

STEVE NEALE

LINDERIDGE 137

Linderidge 137 is a short, seventeen-minute film made by Paul Denby at the New Cinema workshop in Nottingham with a small production grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain and a completion grant (for the production of a print) from the film panel at East Midlands Arts. The film-maker's own stated and initial concern was to examine, problematise and hesitate the narrative and cinematic conventions of the thriller. And this, indeed, is what the film succeeds in doing. What makes it particularly interesting, however, are the issues and questions it raises as a consequence both of its own strategies and of the conjuncture in which it finds itself as regards current critical, theoretical and political debates on the appearance of a recent cycle of horror-thrillers which seem unremittingly to state and re-state an aesthetic and ideological image of woman as ruthlessly and savagely prey to an overtly sexualised and psychotic male violence (*Halloween*, *Dressed to Kill*, *He Knows You're Alone*, *When a Stranger Calls*, *The Shining* and so on).

What I want to do here is to look more

closely at *Linderidge* from the general perspective of that debate, not to argue that it clearly and progressively 'undercuts', 'deconstructs', or 'subverts' the aesthetic and ideological characteristics of the cycle. My aim is rather to tease out one or two of these characteristics as highlighted by the strategy of *Linderidge* itself, so as then to argue that the film's current value lies within contexts of exhibition, education and political discussion that seek precisely to do the same.

Linderidge centres its narrative and its camera on a young female babysitter, left on her own one evening once the parents who have employed her have gone out. Its basic storyline and much of its textual strategy is from 'The Babysitter', a short story by the modernist American writer Robert Coover. It also quotes in voice-over from Alain Robbe-Grillet's short text, 'The Secret Room'. Indeed it uses the curiously ambiguous narrative image of a violently murdered female body, the descriptive focus of 'The Secret Room', as the basis for the repeated visual image over which the text is read. Like both

'The Babysitter' and 'The Secret Room', *Linderidge* works to build a tension. But this tension, and the atmosphere of violence and threat with which it is accompanied (and which it largely works to produce), is not achieved solely by amplifying and sustaining the strands of irresolution inherent in the narrative situation. Nor is it achieved just by articulating that irresolution in terms of a possible diegetic violence, in terms of a menace to one of the characters, cast thus as its potential or actual victim. Such conventional strategies are dependent for their effect upon diegetic clarity, spatio-temporal coherence, and a stability of narrative and character across which the knowledge and the identifications of the spectator or reader are played. Here, instead, such clarity, coherence and stability are absent. Tension and suspense are as much a function of uncertainty, hesitation and anxiety at the level of the spatio-temporal articulation and diegetic status of the narrative 'events' themselves as they are of the elements and characters those events bring into play or of the extent to which there is a conventional delay in their resolution. Moreover, there is no resolution, either in the sense of a final, unambiguous delineation of the events and characters involved, or in the sense of a *dénouement* capable of fully working out the tensions and uncertainties in the drama, defining the conditions for a new, final and stable diegetic equilibrium.

This shift in the level and manner in which suspense operates in *Linderidge* is achieved by combining repetition with variation so that variation serves to undermine the apparent stability and coherence of the events and elements repeated. Where generally repetition serves, literally, to repeat and thus confirm a set of events, settings or

character traits (as, for instance, in a flash-back, or in the simple re-appearance of a prop, decor or character later in the overall chronological sequence of a story), and where variation is generally simply a mark of chronological and dramatic progression (a character may be wearing different clothes; the elements in a decor may have changed owing to an earlier narrative occurrence or simply to the passing of time), here, repetition and variation serve instead to hesitate time, space and narrative, hence to hesitate also the spectator's sense of certainty. For instance, we see the babysitter entering the bathroom and running a bath a number of times. At one level these sequences could be read as repetitions of the same diegetic event (in which case they would already be working against expectations of narrative development). However, each sequence has been slightly differently shot, taken from progressively more distant camera positions. There is no way of judging whether they are just repetitions, referring to the same, identical event, whether any one of them is to be seen as the 'real' event of which the others are memories or flash-backs, or even whether they are to be placed in any temporal order other than that provided by the process of narration itself. In a similar way *Linderidge* also repeats (with readily apparent and 'confusing' variation) a series of telephone calls, which we see and hear solely from the babysitter's point of view. Because we never see (or hear) the callers, because all we see and hear is one side of the different conversations, we never fully find out who is calling. The babysitter clearly knows one of the callers, whom she calls Chris, and appears in response to a request to invite him (or her) over. The other callers are unknown: 'Who is this?' At least one of the four

74 calls (from Chris) is repeated. Largely because of this it is, once again, difficult to locate the calls in an unambiguous diegetic time. Uncertainty and anxiety are then amplified both because the identity of the callers is never revealed and because there is an implication (by convention alone) that one of them could be linked to the hints and traces of violence and threat to the babysitter that consistently cross the narrative process.

These hints and traces are never themselves unambiguous, fully confirmed, articulated and resolved. Firstly there is the repeated image and voice-over text from 'The Secret Room'. The image is a shot of red carpet, with the outlined form of a prostrate body traced in white (a little like those diagram silhouettes of 'the position of the corpse' familiar from police films and murder mysteries). The image appears a number of times thus insinuating itself through repetition and juxtaposition into the story of the babysitter, appearing to presage her death. The text is a cold, descriptive, highly detailed account of the appearance of the (a) corpse itself, taken from Robbe-Grillet:

It is the body of a woman, fully-figured but not heavy, quite naked, lying on her back, her bust slightly raised by thick cushions thrown on the ground, which is covered by a thick patterned carpet.

Different sections of Robbe-Grillet's text are read with each separate appearance of the image. The effect is of a cumulative insistence on a relationship between text and image, on the one hand, and the figure of the babysitter on the other. Secondly the narrative is punctuated at a number of points by a hand-held, markedly 'subjective' camera prowling slowly but relentlessly round the side of

the house, in through the back door, and then, at one point, up to the bathroom door. Taken in conjunction with the image of the body, and with some, at least, of the phone calls, the connotations of threat that seem always to attach themselves to a camera movement of this kind, in this context (clearly marking a point of view, but with the identity of the point of view withheld), are heavily amplified. Then finally, there occurs midway through the film a shot of the babysitter apparently drowned in the bath. Like these other hints of violence and threat, however, the shot is not unambiguous. There is no way of knowing definitively that she is drowned. There is no information elsewhere in the film to confirm this. And, perhaps more importantly, the shot itself lacks narrative clarity and authority, since it is a shot of an image on a video screen — it is representation, not reality.

The hints and traces of violence and threat to which I've been referring are concentrated on and around the figure of the female babysitter. It is here that the issues of the representation of women as objects of such violence and threat find their most obvious point of reference. In my view, however, these issues, that representation, cannot adequately be discussed or considered outside the wider characteristics of the films themselves (the image of woman as victim cannot fully be considered outside the textual conventions that produce that image), which is why I have sought to provide a description of the workings of *Linderidge* as a whole.

I have argued elsewhere, in an analysis of *Halloween*, one of the first films in the recent cycle of horror/thrillers, that there

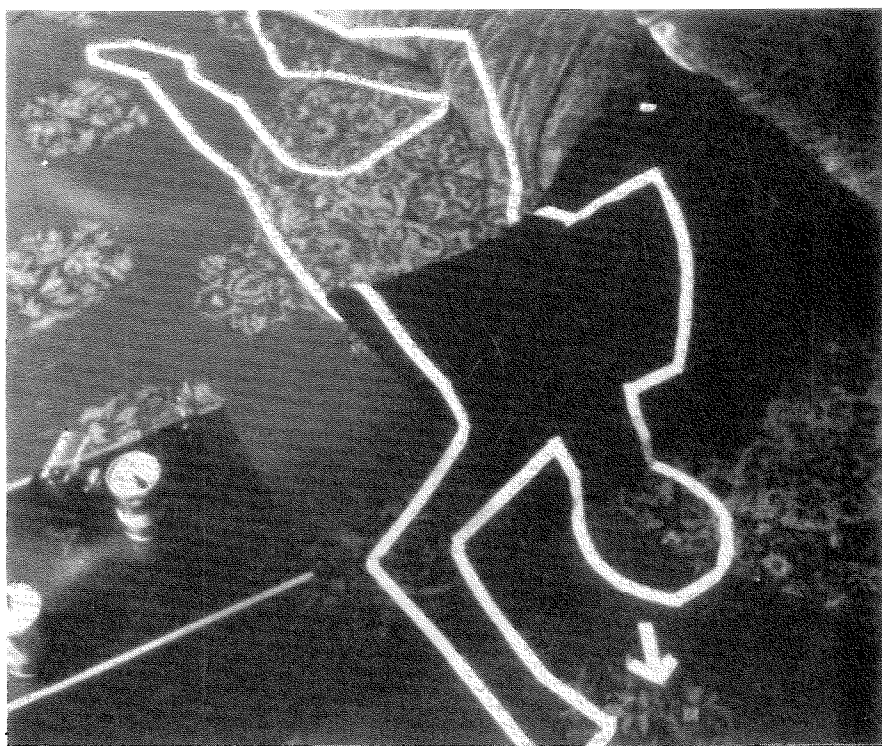
1 Steve Neale, 'Halloween: Suspense, Aggression and the Look', *Framework*, no 14, 1981.

are a number of logically separate strands to the production of the image of woman as object of a suspenseful male threat.¹ Suspense and horror themselves are largely a function of the relations established between the narrative, the look of the camera, the spectator and the characters. These relations are given a content in specific films, but the content is not the sole or determining factor in the production of anxiety and threat, of an atmosphere of violence, and of figures, male or female, who function either as victims or as agents of aggression. As Elizabeth Cowie has pointed out, these figures are first and foremost positions; they exist logically outside of any gender specification,² because suspense, in particular, presupposes a character or

characters lacking the knowledge accorded the spectator by the process of narration. The spectator may know a bomb is placed under the table at which the protagonist is sitting or that an armed assailant is waiting in the dark, but it is a condition of the existence of suspense that the protagonist does not. This *necessarily* places the protagonist in the position of victim: 'The character of protagonist in suspense becomes, in a way, the victim of the narrative — acting blindly in comparison with the audience's knowledge.'³ Hence, in the case of *Coma*, the film that Cowie discusses, 'it is as protagonist, not as woman that Susan [the film's central character] is thus "victim"'.⁴

But the spectator, too, is a victim, in the sense that though his or her knowledge will always exceed that of the fictional victim at the point that danger and suspense tend most markedly to

2 Elizabeth Cowie, 'Discussion of *Coma*, part 2', *m/f* no 4, 1980.



76 occur, he or she will always lack total knowledge, a position fully outside the tensions of the text. (Where is the aggressor precisely? At what point will the attack or the violence occur? Will the victim find out that he or she is under threat in time to escape? Will he or she be injured or killed? And so on.) There are thus a series of layers of knowledge: that possessed by the narrative itself, so to speak, that possessed by the spectator and that possessed by the various characters (this latter knowledge, of course, further layered and distinguished in accordance with the narrative roles and functions the various characters perform). And it is across this series of layers that tension and aggression are articulated, and anxiety produced. Anxiety is solely a product here of specific forms of a lack of knowledge, of a lack of position from which to dominate *totally*, not only the characters in the story, but also the process of the text itself. Insofar as the spectator lacks this knowledge, this position, and insofar as this lack is specifically intensified in moments and sequences of suspense, he or she will be positioned as subject to the aggression of the text itself, able thus all the more to identify with the suffering of the diegetic victim. However, insofar as he or she possesses knowledge exceeding that of the victim, then he or she will be partly at least positioned in identification with the position of the aggressor as well. The spectator's position and identifications will be split, oscillating between that of the subject of enunciation and the enunciating subject (invested in phantasy with control of the text and its knowledge);³ between a position of knowledge and a position of ignorance; between a position of aggression and dominance and a position of suffering, anxiety and subjection; between a sadistic position, on the one hand, and a masochistic position, on the

other. And this, too, whatever the empirical gender of the spectator may be. Such positions and identifications are produced entirely by the text and may, indeed must, be occupied both by male and by female spectators.

All this said, however, it is of course the case that women, female characters, have both traditionally, and more particularly and intensely in the recent cycle being referred to, been cast in the role of victim while men have been cast in the role of aggressor. The various and complex splits in position and identification between passivity and suffering on the one hand and aggressivity and violence on the other have tended to be specified, in accordance with patriarchal ideology, as female in the former instance and as male in the latter. The spectator is thus positioned as complicit, to some extent, with the male violence (insofar as he — or she — shares an aggression against the victim in terms of the narrative articulation of knowledge and point of view), while being complicit with the film and its narrative and ideological system insofar as they articulate a pleasure in the tension and its violence. Moreover, the concatenation of views that in cinema serves predominantly to articulate and differentiate the knowledges of victim and spectator, placing the latter

3 It is hardly surprising, then, that Alfred Hitchcock was known, and cultivated his own image, as the *master* of suspense. That image, moreover, locks quite smoothly into traditional ideologies of the auteur (the idea of the artist as 'master'). It could be argued, in fact, that it was a conjunction of this ideology with the suspense genre, Hitchcock's own image, and the phantasy of omnipotent mastery the genre engenders that provided at least one of the conditions for the emergence of Hitchcock as the cinema's most publicly known, loved and celebrated commercial director.

in a position of superiority over the former, have tended also to produce and inscribe for the spectator a markedly voyeuristic look. And this look is further marked, intensified and eroticised by offering the body of the female victim as its object, by specifying the aggressor as male and investing him with marked phallic attributes and characteristics, and by articulating the menace and the attack in sexual terms, as a form of rape: the eroticism of the voyeuristic look is thus, as it were, further eroticised, the aggression specified (and enjoyed) as a form of male desire.

If we return now to *Linderidge* we can note, I think, a number of its features which, in combination with discussion and analysis, serve to highlight a number of these aesthetic and ideological conventions both by hesitating the codes of the thriller while remaining, simultaneously, within their overall field or ambit and by thus emphasising their artifice and their logic. Firstly, by refusing the viewer an unambiguous knowledge, a complete and self-sufficient point of view, while drawing him or her into an intrigue which it refuses to resolve, *Linderidge* in one sense intensifies the anxiety and aggression built into the formats of the thriller and suspense. If, conventionally, the thriller offers the viewer a certain knowledge and position while simultaneously marking a lack, it is only so that that lack will finally be filled: the tensions will be resolved, the enigma answered. Here, however, the lack is never filled: we never find out whether the babysitter was murdered, or even whether she was actually under threat. We feel that threat, however, both because of the hints the narrative ambiguously offers and because of our own position (ie we are given a knowledge over the babysitter but denied any confirmation that that

knowledge, if you like, is correct). The anxiety and aggression engendered by this strategy are thus solely the province of the viewer. In highlighting this, the film effectively generates a distance between the threat and aggression, on the one hand, and the image of a woman as its object, on the other, a distance which both heightens and disturbs the ideological convention which seems to demand that image. It is in part *because* the centre of tension is a woman that the suspense is augmented, that we expect an attack to occur. We expect her to be victim, but in the end not because the narrative actually and unambiguously places her in that position, but because that is what the convention is.

In the same movement that the film produces a distance between the aesthetic conventions of suspense and the ideological convention of woman as victim (the disturbance of the latter caused by the disturbance of the former), so it also both highlights and disturbs the voyeuristic conventions of the look. This it does by detaching the look at the woman from what might be termed the threatening look, by refusing the latter a diegetic source (as the point of view, for instance, of a male attacker), and by denying any of its looks any ultimate narrative authority. The camera tends to concentrate primarily on the babysitter, inscribing her as the object of its look. This look is eroticised to the extent that its concentration on her produces a form of visual fascination. It is eroticised also by having her repeatedly enter the bathroom, and at one point by having her answer the phone with only a towel wrapped round her. However, this eroticisation and its concomitant voyeurism is not *especially* marked: we never see her undressed or undressing or in any other way markedly *displayed* for

78 the look of the camera. At the point that we see her drowned in the bath, the image is distanced by being filmed in video. The quality of the video image and its placing on a video screen serve to defuse the voyeuristic spectacle inherent in the nature of the shot. The look articulated by these shots is not in itself especially threatening or aggressive, though it does induce an anxiety because of the context in which it is found. Threat and aggression are instead found inscribed visually in the shots in which the camera moves around and into the house.

These shots, interestingly enough, are comparable to the opening shot in *Halloween*, as the camera moves into the house as the subjective point of view of the killer. The tension and threat are built up partly because the identity of the character from whose point of view the shot is taken is delayed: we don't see who it is until the stabbing has occurred. A similar tension and threat are built up in *Linderidge*. The difference, however, is that here there is neither a diegetic act of aggression, nor any final revelation as to the identity of the point of view. Indeed, it is never made clear whether there is a point of view, despite the convention that a shot of this kind should be specified as such. There are two points of interest here. The first is that as one watches the film in the context of the hints of aggression it provides, one assumes that the shot is not only the mark of the point of view of a character, but that that character is male, thus serving to some extent to highlight the aesthetic and ideological conventions being here undermined. The second is that, through this strategy of refusal of a

diegetic motivation for the shots, and through the connotations of (masculine) aggression attached to them, *Linderidge* highlights the extent to which that aggression involves, indeed is partly demanded by, the spectator. It is part of the condition of the spectator's enjoyment of suspense and of the genre's provision of pleasure. To what extent, then, can one specify that aggression, enjoyment and pleasure as male? What are the links between them and the image of woman as victim in terms of the gender and psychology of the viewer? Can one differentiate the subjectivity of male and female viewers across the structures of looking, narration, aggression and threat that they share?

In my view *Linderidge* 137 is an interesting, and above all, *useful* film, because it allows (indeed demands) that these issues be raised and examined. And that use can best be realised in contexts of exhibition, education and discussion that allow such examination to take place. And there is, perhaps, a further issue involved: *Linderidge* both hesitates and plays with the various aesthetic and ideological conventions involved in the thriller, just as this article seeks to unravel and describe them. To what extent, finally, is there then a reinscription of the values of those conventions through a fascination one can find and locate clearly in both? To what extent is that fascination, again, a male one? Perhaps answers to *these* questions can, once more, be provided only within contexts that allow them to be posed and discussed. Which is why their consideration in relation to any film is vitally and politically important.

SERGEI EISENSTEIN, WILHELM REICH CORRESPONDENCE

79

Introduction

IN JANUARY 1977, the Soviet sociology journal *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya* published two letters written by Eisenstein and Wilhelm Reich in 1934, which Naum Kleiman, the curator of the Eisenstein museum in Moscow, had found in a copy of Reich's *Die Function des Orgasmus* ('The Function of the Orgasm', 1927), which was originally in Eisenstein's possession.

The publication of these two letters throws some light on Eisenstein's relations with psychoanalysis. Hitherto it has been unknown that Eisenstein had any but the most fleeting relations with Wilhelm Reich, and that in 1934 they addressed one another as 'Esteemed Comrade'.¹ Eisenstein had been brusquely ordered home from America, and was about to be attacked and lectured at, and to suffer the tragedy of *Bezhin Meadow*. Reich, an exile in Denmark, had just been excluded from the International Psychoanalytic Association, having already been expelled from the German Communist Party.

Eisenstein's biographers — Mary Seton, Ion Barna, Werner Sudendorf — do mention his interest in psychoanalysis and psychology — especially in the period of his trip through Europe to the USA (he met Hanns Sachs in Berlin, visited the Magnus Hirschfeld Institute, and Stefan Zweig 'almost' managed to arrange for him to meet Freud) — but this is usually seen only as an attempt at 'self-analysis'. It is indisputable that Eisenstein's relationship of attraction and repulsion to Freud is connected with the 'biographical question',² but psychoanalysis is also integral to

1 'Werter Genosse . . .'. Eisenstein and Reich both use the same respectful and comradely mode of address.

2 The last parenthesis in his letter (in a final passage added later) says this clearly . . . Cf also his evocation of drawings so 'revealing', so 'shamelessly sincere' that he tore almost all of them up on the spot (*Mémoires I*, p 109, 10/18, Paris 1975). On his relations with Freud, see Jacques Aumont's article 'Eisenstein avec Freud (notes)' in *Cahiers du Cinéma* nos 226-7, and his introduction to the 10/18 edition of *Mémoires*.

- 3 Louis Fischer: 'Mass Movie', *The Nation* (New York), 9th November 1927, J Freeman: *An American Testament*, 1936, cit by Mary Seton in her *Sergei Eisenstein, a Life*.

- 4 Interview with Bruno Frei, *Die Weltbühne* no 32, 1928 (partly reprinted in Eisenstein: *Schriften* Bd 3, Reihe Hanser, p 260).

- 5 See J Marti: 'La Psychanalyse en Russie (1909-1930)', *Critique* no 356 (March 1976). Russia had got to know psychoanalysis before 1914, earlier than France or Italy. Moreover, Luria was first regarded as a psychoanalyst. However, Dr Tatiana Rosenthal, although a psychoanalyst, criticised 'Freud's psychosexual monism', as did Vera Schmidt. These two doctors practised psychoanalysis during the socialist regime, particularly in the context of the Moscow State Institute of Psychoanalysis, which published many translations of Freud, Ferencsi, Melanie Klein, etc. At this time the

his 'aesthetic' project, his theory of art and of the cinema. Second-years students at VGIK, the Moscow film school, had to study Prinzhorn and Freud on 'the laws of human expressiveness'.

Eisenstein's *Memoirs* tell us that he read Freud very early: 'A Childhood Memory of Leonardo Da Vinci' and (probably) extracts from the *Traumdeutung* around 1918, the *Three Essays on Sexuality* in 1920. Although there is hardly any specific reference to Freudian theory in the theoretical writings, Eisenstein continued to emphasise the importance he attributed to Freud until his return from the USA. The American journalists Louis Fischer and Joseph Freeman, visiting Moscow in 1927, independently recorded unequivocal statements to this effect.³ Freeman reports a conversation with Eisenstein and Tretjakov in which the latter, engaged in writing a biographical note on the film-maker, was asked to stress 'the enormous influence of Freud'. The following year, in Berlin, Eisenstein was not averse to being called a 'Freudian' in an interview for *Die Weltbühne*. On this occasion, it is clear that it is a matter of explicating the signifying logic of the cinema and not the relations between the creator and his product, as is the case, on the other hand, in the following year, in the December 1929 issue of *Cinéma*, where he once again refers to Freud's study of Leonardo.⁴

We have an erroneous position on the notion of the symbol. It is wrong to claim that the symbol is something lifeless. The power of symbolising is always a living power, since it pertains to the essence of human sensory reaction.

Ahah! So you're Freudian?

No doubt. Since every man symbolises without noticing it, film must draw the consequences. It is not the symbol that has arisen that interests me, but the symbol arising. Thus, for example, I should express the doctrine of the Marxist dialectic in a plastic way.

For a whole variety of reasons, ranging from the 'interdiction' of Freud and psychoanalysis in the USSR from the 1930s on⁵ to his own repression of the sexual, Eisenstein subsequently came more and more to deny any pertinence to Freudian theory. Thus, in his *Memoirs*, he writes: 'I took me years to see that the primordial basis of the instincts is broader than the sexual sphere, to which Freud confines it, ie, broader than the framework of the mere biological fortunes of human individuals'.⁶ In the interview

with I Veissfeld just before his death, Eisenstein returned to this problem in the same terms,⁷ but it is clear from a reading of his answer to Reich that even in 1934, Eisenstein had worked out this kind of refutation of psychoanalysis, drawing in part on his readings of German psychologists.⁸ In addition, this rejection of psychoanalysis is in conformity with his reflections on 'ecstasy' cited in the letter.

Ecstasy (*eksstasis*) is the spectator's 'going out of himself', what makes him change his place, leap from his seat, applaud, cry out . . . Not a going out 'into nowhere', ecstasy is 'the transition to something else, something qualitatively different' ('On the Structure of the Thing' in *Non-Indifferent Nature*). Superseding the theory of the attraction, of conflict and of intellectual cinema, ecstasy signifies the moment of grasping the *thesis*, it is the *Aufhebung*, the moment of *ideological totalisation*. Eisenstein saw mystical ecstasy as a primitive achievement of this process, hence his interest in it when he was in France, his study of mystical texts and religious works. Until *Non-Indifferent Nature* (ie, until the 1940s), there is no real statement of this theory, so it is interesting to read here how much he had already been concerned with it.

Eisenstein then turned to prelogical thought and the relationship between representation and memory. His 1935 lecture ('Film Form New Problems') propounded the first hypothesis by linking anthropology and psychology: Lévy-Bruhl, Wundt (analysts of primitive societies) and Luria, Vygotsky (the latter published his *Language and Thought* in 1934). Eisenstein adopted from them the 'materialist' dogma of the repetition of ontogeny by phylogeny, and inscribed an evolutionist aspect in his researches. 'Vertical Montage' (1940) developed the second hypothesis, making particular use of *Gestalt* psychology.

It might be remarked that in this 1934 letter, Eisenstein responds to Reich on the latter's own terrain, and not at all from a Freudian viewpoint: the reference to the vegetative, to the organic, the distinction between the normal and the pathological, were components of Reich's problematic in these years (cf *The Sexual Revolution*). At the time, Eisenstein had abandoned references to Pavlov and Bekhterev and was entirely 'wrapped up' in a 'psycholinguistic' investigation (cf the conversations with Paul Robeson evoked in the *Memoirs*: he moves from Marr to Lévy-Bruhl, Wundt, Frazer, Humboldt, Cushing and Granet!). What is it *before* language, *before* consciousness, that propels us towards them? Film having the task of taking the spectator along this path

reflexologists and the analysts, 'far from opposing one another, sought a rapprochement' (J Marti, *op cit*). Around 1925-6, Eisenstein claimed allegiance *both* to Pavlov and to Freud.

The Soviet psychoanalysts granted a central place to *sublimation* and opposed the domination of the sexual: the drives, individual desires, are not destined to be satisfied but to be sublimated in socially useful activities. It is clear that, in the USSR, there were 'straight away' anti-Freudian, 'anti-sexual' marxists. But it is a long way from Eisenstein's attack on Pletnëv as a 'Freudian' to his appeal to 'free ourselves once and for all from the Freudian complex' after his speech to the Film-makers Congress in 1935.

6 *Mémoires I*, pp 138-9

7 'Mon dernier entretien avec Eisenstein', Ilya Veissfeld, *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 208

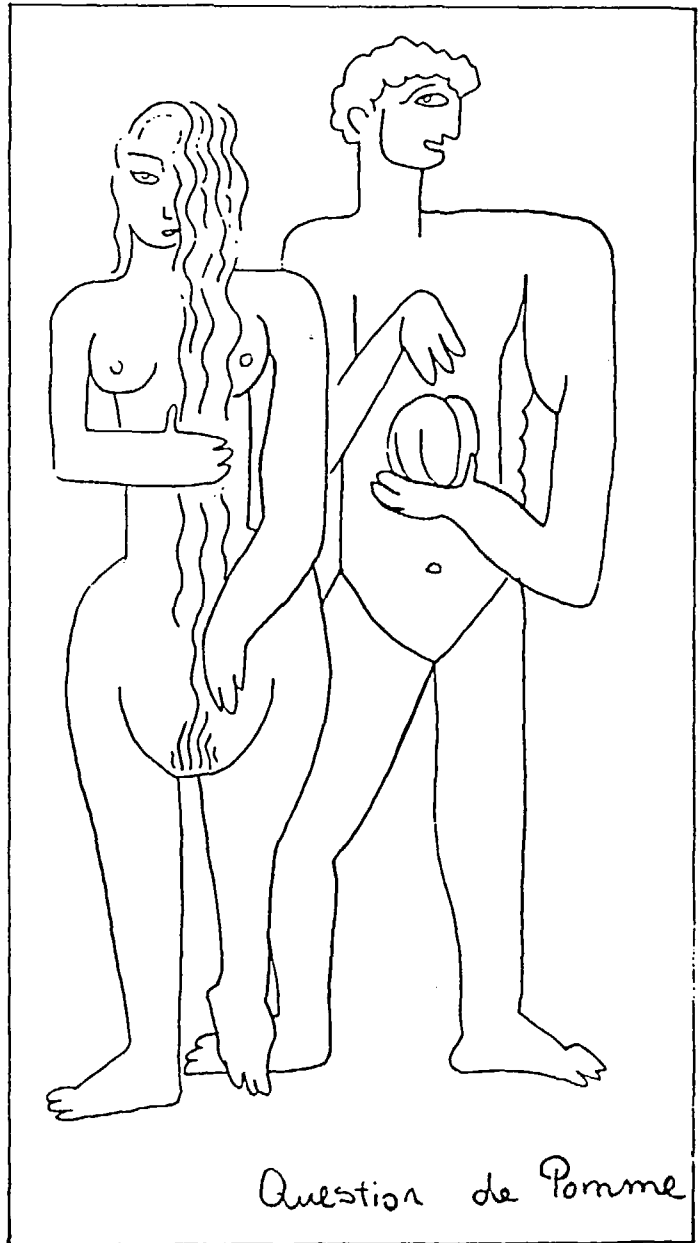
8 Eg W Wundt or Ludwig Klages, the latter of whom repudiated psycho-

analysis as follows: it is a 'pan-sexualism' in which 'the living individual is an appendix of the reproductive cells for which it is a dependent variable; a motif which is, incidentally, reminiscent of Schopenhauer...' (*Die Wissenschaft des Charakters*, 1927).

'from stratum to stratum', from 'primitive language to the highest form', from the 'ideological content' to the 'theme', in other words, the Idea (in the letter, as in 'Film Form New Problems', he cites . . . Hegel).

FRANCOIS ALBERA

SME drawing



PO Box 827 Copenhagen
14/VII/1934

Dear Comrade Eisenstein,

Immediately I received your letter I asked the publishers to send you the texts you requested. Please let me know if they have not reached you within ten days. The book on the orgasm^[1] is out of print, but the International Psychoanalytic Publishing House, Vienna I, Börsegasse II, may still have some copies.

As you say you are interested in my conceptions of sexual economy, I should like to take this opportunity to point out that the sequel to my clinico-theoretical investigations into the basic problem will be printed seriatim in the next numbers of the journal ('The Primal Opposition of Vegetative Life').^[2] I was particularly pleased to hear from a leading comrade in the artistic field that art has a great deal to do with the central problem of the living substance, with orgasm. I have not heard this from others; on the contrary one meets much hostility if one dares to drag high art into such a 'lowly zone' as that of sexual life. I am thinking of a statement from a comrade known to us both, Hanns Eisler, who denies any connection between music and sexuality;^[3] how this is possible I find hard to understand; but I am sure that to do so is to block any possibility of mastering the living questions of the cultural politics of the proletarian movement, and I hope one day to be able to prove it at length.

Many sincere thanks for your offer of assistance. I think the cause of the cultural revolution would be well served if we could one day grasp the fundamental significance of sexual politics for the revolutionary film and put it into practice. Perhaps one day we will have a chance to discuss the matter together. For many years I have been concerned as to how the cinematic sexual politics of the bourgeoisie could be consciously and consistently opposed by a revolutionary one. Our work in this area hitherto has been predominantly rationalist, but it seems to me to downplay the question of personal and especially of sexual life, or not to answer it correctly.

To illustrate what I mean: *Bed and Sofa* made an essentially correct beginning, but *The Road to Life* failed to answer what sexual form to oppose to the bourgeois one; *Earth* brilliantly expressed the orgasmic element, in *Battleship Potemkin* one was simply overwhelmed by the rhythm, which is a direct continuation

[1] *Die Funktion des Orgasmus: zur Psychopathologie und zur Soziologie des Geschlechtslebens*, Internationale Psychoanalytische Verlag, Vienna 1927. The English translation by T P Wolfe as *The Function of the Orgasm* authorised by Reich in 1941 differs considerably from the first published German edition; it has been reprinted many times, eg, by Panther in 1968.

[2] 'Die Urgegensatz des Vegetatives Lebens', *Zeitschrift für politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie*, vol I, 1934 and as *Abhandlungen zur personellen Sexualökonomie*, no 2, Sexpol Verlag, Copenhagen 1934, translated as 'The Basic Antithesis of Vegetative Life' by Hella Bernays and Barbara Goldenberg, *Journal of Orgonomy* vols 1-2, 1967-8. It is not completely clear whether this is the text Reich has sent to Eisenstein; if so the 'sequel' presumably refers to *Abhandlungen...* nos 3-5: 'Psychischer Kontakt und

vegetative Stromung', 1935, 'Experimentielle Ergebnisse über die elektrische Funktion von Sexualität und Angst', 1935, and 'Orgasmusreflex, Muskelhaltung und Korperausdruck', 1937; or whether it is itself the 'sequel', in which case he must have sent Eisenstein no 1, 'Der Orgasmus als Elektro-physiologische Entladung' 1934 translated by Joseph Gross and Barbra Koopman as 'The Orgasm as an Electro-physiological Discharge' in the *Journal of Orgonomy*, vol 2, no 2, 1968).

of the basic biologico-sexual rhythm.^[4] As far as I can judge, the rational ideas of communism are most effective in film if they are properly articulated with biological rhythm. Forgive me for venturing to deal with such difficult questions so crudely, but since, as I have said, I have been preoccupied by these questions for a long time, I did not want to let the opportunity slip to expound them to you. I should be delighted if a preparatory discussion of these questions could be carried further, and it would certainly be of value for our work if you would one day discuss with us your views as to the possibility of working the emotional, including the sexual, life of man into the rational aims of revolutionary cultural politics. We have a major work in preparation here on the effects and methods of influence of the bourgeois film on the broad non-political masses.

With best wishes,

Yours,

Wilhelm Reich

PS In the orgasm book I stick closely to clinical conceptions; the last chapter, which I wrote in my pre-Marxist period, needs a lot of corrections.

S M Eisenstein to Wilhelm Reich

- [3] Hanns Eisler
1896-1962
Austrian-born
Communist,
composer and
friend and
collaborator of
Bertolt Brecht; I
have been unable
to find in his
published writings
any statement
corresponding to
Reich's paraphrase.

Dear Comrade Reich,

Thank you very much for your very interesting package. Your new article, too, is of great interest. But I should like precisely to set out some of the differences between our conceptions. It seems to me that you, like psychoanalysis, over-emphasise the purely-sexual: I mean the physically sexual (*Geschlechtlich-Sexuelle*). The sexual (*Geschlechtliche*) as the basis of all manifestations is incorrect, in my opinion. I would rather ascribe this to the organic-vegetative, the process in which the sexual (*sexuelle*) is no more than one individual manifestation. (One of the strongest, but still one aligned in parallel, and not basally determinant.) The mutual interaction of the derivative functions of the biologico-vegetative is what leads to explanations in which one is based on the other (in a quite mechanistic conception). I have not sufficiently examined the question in general to discuss it in all its breadth. But one partial problem — ecstasy (in connection with pathos) to which I have devoted a great deal of time,^[5] completely convinces me that the usual sexual conception of this phenomenon leads in a quite false direction. The sexual form (*Bild*) in it is no more

- [4] *Bed and Sofa*,
aka *Third*
Meshchanskaya,
directed by Abram
Room 1927; *The*
Road to Life,
directed by
Nikolai Ekk 1931;
Earth, directed by
Aleksandr

than a 'way station', an intermediate stage. Sexual orgasm as such is merely one individual manifestation of the ecstatic. As I say — the 'cheapest' and most commonplace way into those possibilities of ecstatic enjoyment which wholly depends on primal phenomena which are pre-sexual, and to which in one direction sexual activity can serve as a 'transition'. A lop-sided conception which emphasises the individual, the sexual far beyond the limits of its real significance is a very common error. It may be correct in the pathological case, where this is precisely a *precondition* of its pathological character. The boundary between the normal and the pathological cannot be drawn — every child knows this today. But given that for years now the emphasis has been on the pathological it is time perhaps to pay more attention to the normal. The psychoanalytical world picture is a reflection of a pathological social world. Hypersexualisation as compensation for sexual deprivation is — for that world — 'normal'. And in it and its environment no other conception can arise. A critique of such a world view can only come from a world, a part of the world, in which the 'normal' is . . . normal and commonplace, where people are not tied to social contradictions which condition and bring into being all other contradictions and ultimately distort the whole normal image of life and conceive what is as what 'ought to be'. In the social sphere the negation of this order is already sufficiently advanced. But as soon as the superstructure rather than the primitive base of exploitation is at stake, confusion reigns. The superstructure is regarded as normal-organic, although such a conception is no more than a reflection of quite unorganic and abnormal social relations in which it is rooted. This explains the fact, for example, that psychoanalysis is illuminating in pathological cases (if not too therapeutically effective — and here Stefan Zweig is right — psychoanalysis lacks . . . 'psychosynthesis').^[6] On the other hand, when it attempts to explain 'normal' phenomena (ie, phenomena closer to the normal end of the indivisible line 'pathological-normal') it constantly runs into quite impractical dead-ends. Above all where anything to do with art and artistic activity as a work process is concerned. Here psychoanalysis yields *nothing* constructive, here psychoanalysis finally yields nothing revealing as to process — instead just the inimate-sensational — and very little as far as mere symbolic *content* aspect (*Stofflichen*) of the work is concerned. But nothing to do with the form as the regular character (*Gesetzmässigkeit*) of the construction of the work as such (ie in the Hegelian sense). That is merely with what is closer in the

Dovzhenko 1930;
*Battleship
Potemkin*,
directed by
Eisenstein 1925.

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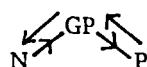
[5] See especially 'The Structure of the Film' in *Film Form*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1949, pp 150-78, and (an earlier version of part of the same text) 'Organic Unity and Pathos in the Composition of *Potemkin*' in *Notes of a Film Director*, FLPH, Moscow 1948, pp 53-62; originally entitled 'The Structure of the Thing', this text was first published in 1939.

[6] Stefan Zweig:
'Analysis can give knowledge and nothing more. For the very reason that it has no place for faith, it can only supply us with facts, with realities, but never with a philosophy. . . . It dissolves and subdivides and separates; it shows to each life its own meaning; but it is incompetent to weave these separate strands into a common meaning. If it is to be supplemented until it becomes truly creative, the analysis and enlightenment its effects must have

superadded to them a conjoining and fusing technique; psychoanalysis must be supplemented by psychosynthesis.* From 'Sigmund Freud' in *Mental Healers: Franz Anton Mesmer, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul, Cassell and Co, London 1933, p 358 (German original published in 1931.

*The introduction by François Albera has been translated with minor alterations from *Cahiers du Cinema* nos 234-35. Both letters were in German, and have been translated from the German texts published in *Sotsiologicheskii Issledovaniya* vol XV no 1, 1977. Reich's letter was in typescript, Eisenstein's a rough MS copy. Eisenstein has noted on Reich's letter 'responded 28 7 34'.

indivisible couple form and content to what can be attributed to the purely-anecdotal and not to the process of the emergence of the work of art. As soon as you rid yourself of the sexual-fetishistic conception and consider the world from the normal sexual and organic standpoint, everything will be different. As a Marxist you must realise that pathology and norm, though they may be quantitatively comparable, are qualitatively incommensurable. And this means that the regularity (*Gesetzmässigkeit*) of the relations in the existential form (*Existenz-Bild*) of the pathological are [sic] 'non-transferable' as laws for the normal. And the combination of the two is not unilinear but triangular, the apex forming a certain general regularity (*Gesetzmässigkeit*), whose phenomenal forms can turn out to be normal in one case, pathological in the other.



and not
 $N \rightleftharpoons P$

A direct deduction from one to the other in the field of the *understanding* of one through the other is impossible (although the transition *itself* is possible and does take place), and if it is made nonetheless — it inevitably leads to the refutation of the system which allowed things to be conceived in this way in the first place. This I believe is the vitally and instinctively correct basis for revulsion to psychoanalysis. *The form of the relationships as represented by psychoanalysis denies the real state of affairs.* The 'self projection' of neurosis, to which all hostility to psychoanalysis has been attributed thus plays a limited role, however noisy, just as the sexual does in the hypersexualised distorted image of reality which psychoanalysis, pathological in itself, adopts. This explains the lopsidedness in the rejection of psychoanalysis on the one hand by an ultimately very small number of 'sufferers' — the time of the vulgar obscurantist opposition to psychoanalysis in its earliest years is surely long past — and on the other hand by the entire philosophical system of a whole — and the only — *socially healthy* country. I deliberately emphasise here not the conflict between Marxism and a system which puts the biological before the sociological, but the inward organically conditioned reasons for rejection that arise against psychoanalysis quite naturally in the *normal* 'part' of the personality (and not in the pathological, which precisely indulges pleasurably in psychoanalysis once the first reaction of repulsion has been overcome!).

Translation by Ben Brewster

A NOTE ON THE ITALIAN CINEMA DURING FASCISM

To programme a film from the period just after the fall of fascism (*I ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves*, 1948) for a discussion of the Italian cinema during fascism is to imply connections which are not merely chronological. It is these connections I wish to discuss, specifically, what is the relation of Italian 'neo-realism' to the Italian cinema under fascism?

First, a number of assertions. Italian fascism served the interests primarily of Italian capital much as current Western liberal democracies serve similar interests. The fascist state is an exceptional form of the capitalist state, but is a capitalist state nevertheless. That state created conditions in the film industry favourable for the investment of capital, specifically by the large banks. Capital investment in films is always 'risk' capital, particularly in countries like Italy where there is a relatively small national market. The fascist state

encouraged investments by securing them against loss while creating conditions for profit — tax incentives, state subsidies, import restrictions against foreign competition, screening quotas, the training of artists and technicians, the provision of studios and equipment. Cinecittà and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia are accomplishments of the fascist state as were film production figures which went from just over 20 films per year in the early 1930s to nearly 120 films per year a decade later.

The state was not interested in the cinema primarily as an instrument for direct propaganda, some kind of fascisation of the Italians, but as an industrial-financial field for profits by Italian capital. The best propaganda for a fascist Italy was a successful Italian film at the box office. Italian films of the 1930s were produced much as they were in Hollywood — the model for the Italian film industry — for mass appeal and large profits but with the difference that the state was instrumental for their realisation. Italian films were made and marketed in popular film genres — social comedies, historical

* This article is the text of a lecture delivered at the Italian Cultural Institute, Melbourne, Australia, 9 June 1981.

88 epics, adventure films, war films, pirate films — played by stars constructed by the studios and supported by fan magazines and gossip columnists. I want to stress the very ordinariness of the Italian film industry during the years of fascism — an industry quite like other film industries in other capitalist countries, primarily concerned with profit.

None of this is incredible unless one assumes, incorrectly I believe, that Italian fascism constructed a vast machine for the production of fascist ideology — a spectacle of ideology — particularly in the area of popular culture — the cinema, radio, the theatre and sport which it restricted and fully controlled. The need to believe in an ideologically militant fascism has re-read the commercial film industry of the 1930s as an industry which by means of 'mere entertainment' offered to Italians — in fact misled Italians — from an understanding of contemporary reality, to providing simple diversion, escapism, *evasione, i telefoni bianchi*. That is, pleasure served the fascist state as a pacifier against the pain which it otherwise inflicted, exploiting Italians in reality while giving them the sop of white telephones, false hopes, the easy life in phantasms on the screen.

If this is true, and I believe it mostly is not, the same difference of diversion, entertainment and escape on the screen and a miserable social reality off-screen was a paradigm not confined to Italy or to fascism but a characteristic of films made within capitalist industrial structures in America, in France, in England. The politics of pleasure is not so banal as the complex fascism-capitalism-entertainment-escapism.

To give a single example of the capital-profit direction of the Italian film industry during fascism: in 1938 a struggle occurred within the state Ministry of

Popular Culture between a 'left' wanting renewed state control over the means of cultural production and a 'right' anxious to lessen such control in order to facilitate not propaganda, but profit. The 'right' succeeded. A system of state subsidies to film production prior to production and dependent on Ministry approval of the film's subject, its script and those who were to work on it was abolished and in its stead a system of prizes were offered to films on the basis of their box office success. At the same time there was a significant easing of the censorship laws making them even more liberal than during the pre-fascist Liberal government of Giolitti. Films showing the highest returns received the greater subsidies. The measure not only helped the larger companies at the expense of smaller ones but shifted the criteria for government funding from state approval to public acclaim. It was not that the 'left' wanted a propaganda cinema or had in mind direct political ideological impositions on film-makers, but rather desired a certain 'quality' control, 'good' films rather than 'bad' and saw the new government measures as a victory for industry over art, commerce over culture, popular taste over, in effect, a cultivated bourgeois taste. Whereas the 'left' wanted government funds to protect an unprofitable art cinema, the 'right' wanted these same funds to further a popular commercial one.

In other words, except for a few fascist ideologues on the extreme left of the party who sought the promotion of ideological positions through the mass media, the essential argument over the film industry was between a direct commercialism and one tempered by a certain consideration for the values of 'art'. That the fascist 'right' had its way, that is to say, that positions aligned with Italian finance and

industrial capital in the film industry succeeded, positioned this 'left' and the art cinema which it sought, in a vague opposition to official policy, but not by any means in an anti-fascism.

It was this 'art' tradition in the Italian cinema, present throughout the decade of the 1930s and well up to 1943, worthy rather than popular, characterised by a certain 'realism' of appearance, which placed itself as the contrary to the dominant, seemingly artificial, genre-organised commercial cinema, and which was later to be placed in retrospect as in opposition to state cultural policies, that formed the tradition of Italian 'neo-realism' after 1943, the works of Antonioni, De Sica, Rossellini, Visconti, with their attendant apparent anti-fascism, their bourgeois appeal and honest 'realist' artistry.

The multiple signs under which Italian neo-realism appears post-war, of anti-fascism, *italianità*, art, realism, and the representation of popular struggle, is in continuance of a film tradition of realism and 'quality' operative during the fascist period in the works of Alessandrini, Blasetti, Poggioli, Rossellini. Neo-realism was read back into the fascist past where it found its genitors in films and film-makers which it would characterise as subversively anti-fascist within the fascist period when what was perhaps more to the point was that these films and the films of neo-realism represented an Italian bourgeois art tradition which fascism easily accommodated and which posed neither cultural nor political threat — the film interests of the state were simply elsewhere.

Neo-realism has been variously described as representing a social reality repressed and misrepresented during fascism; as developing a new narrativity in which events appeared as less contrived

by a narrative than dictated by the reality the events described — a new narrativity contrived to make things appear 'more realistic'; and as expressing a traditional humanism, so renewing the values of a bourgeois past disrupted by fascist rule: in De Sica, love and the family against bureaucracy and the impersonality of the state; in Rossellini, love, suffering, sacrifice, Christian virtues against the formulas of political ideology; in Visconti, passion and decadence opposed to the conventionality and *tutto bene* of a decade of representations. Not only then was neo-realism said to be a matter of a new narrative structuring, but of a newness in what was described and denoted by these narratives as if Italian neo-realism placed on the screen that which, during fascism, had supposedly occurred in a reality off-screen: families destroyed, adultery, forbidden passions, poverty, despair, suicide — no longer the cinema of petit-bourgeois dreams, but rather of petit-bourgeois nightmares, the phantasms of loss, failure, defeat, humiliation.

I do not wish to contest any of these perspectives, but to only note, for example, in the instance of *I ladri di biciclette*, that though a certain grim historical reality of unemployment, bureaucracy and despair is represented, that representation of misery is by means of a machine designed to give pleasure, and that such a pleasure machine not only has economic-commercial correlates — pleasure-brings-profit — but that its design resembles that of other machines made during fascism, in the commercial as well as the 'art' cinema, in Hollywood as well as in Italy.

The pleasures of *I ladri di biciclette* are pleasures which derive from its traditional realism, the construction of a system of make-believe, in which we know that the

90 film text is only a text, only a fiction, and yet suppose, 'as if', that it is not. The system depends on giving events and characters and objects identities, origins, goals, destinies apparently outside the bounds of the narrative, 'a life' before the appearance of the text, and one which continues after it, so that the textual function is seemingly only to observe, to record, to re-produce, quite literally, to re-present. *I ladri di biciclette* initiates an alternation between hope and despair, found objects and lost objects, in a substitutive series job/bicycle/thief/old man/son/love which suspends the spectator in a game of lost-and-found, of hide-and-seek, not only of objects but between the reality of the text which constructs them and the imaginary reality so constructed. The simulacrum, 'the

world', and the narrative text, together affirm and negate each other in a perpetual gamble with the spectator of incredulity and credibility at ever increasing stakes.

I ladri di biciclette is exemplary of Italian neo-realist cinema. Its mechanisms are traditional and unexceptional of an all too common realism — a fetishism in which signs of reality take the place of reality, a regressive make-believe, the voyeurism of a privileged spectator impelled to look, to know, to dominate. As I wished to stress the very ordinariness of the cinema under fascism in its economic and ideological directions, I wish to stress the same for the aesthetic purposes of Italian neo-realism, and to find between the one ordinariness and the other a connection that has for too long been denied.

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ROSALIND COWARD, JOHN ELLIS

HONG KONG - CHINA 1981

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An invitation to the University of Hong Kong for the authors of *Language and Materialism*. An opportunity to explore further two old obsessions: the cinema of Hong Kong and the politics of China. Hong Kong was available for our understanding far more than China: our particular situation as guests rather than simple tourists ensured this. Two impressions stand out: one is of the ways that each culture has maintained a mass cinema in the age of television; the other is of the emerging relationship between Hong Kong and China.

1 HONG KONG: CINEMA AND GENRE

There is a pervasive feeling that, with China's new policy of the Four Modernisations Hong Kong is about to resume the role of entrepôt between China and the West. From the Peak of Hong Kong island, capitalism casts its calculating eyes over the world's largest under-exploited markets and its vast untapped natural resources. Meanwhile China manoeuvres to gain an increasing stake in capitalist Hong Kong, attempting to define its own terms for technical and economic co-operation. In between lies

Hong Kong's own population, over five million, overwhelmingly Chinese in origin. Their situation is precarious as they have no formal democratic structures. In addition, the British colonial government is uncertain about acting as caretaker for international finance and nervous about Hong Kong's long-term political future. All of this makes Hong Kong an exciting and precarious city-state, a tiny enclave that may have a crucial effect on China's immediate future.

In the area of film and television, there are currently very few links between Hong Kong and China. Television is a relatively new development in China, and by all accounts is still in the stage of developing characteristic genres. Television is well established in Hong Kong with four competing channels (two Cantonese, two English) run by competing organisations, RTV and TVB. All channels broadcast from the early morning until after midnight. Cinema films are a significant proportion of this output, with about seventy-five being broadcast in any one week. However, the two companies that have traditionally dominated Hong Kong

92 cinema, Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest, have never sold their films to television. The Cantonese channels show low-budget Cantonese films of the 1950s, old Taiwanese films, in Mandarin or dubbed, and newer films from Hong Kong's independent producers.

Despite this massive amount of broadcast television, Hong Kong still maintains a mass cinema. The reasons for this are predominantly social. The vast cinemas (all over 1000 seats) are air-conditioned whereas most homes are not. This is important in a sub-tropical climate with no real temperature difference between day and night. Housing for the majority is poor and very cramped, and this encourages public leisure activities like cinema-going and eating in restaurants. The population is predominantly young, mostly under thirty: a population used to a high level of image-consumption. Cinema in Hong Kong provides a distinctive form of spectacle, both because of the spectacular nature of the cinema image, and because the cost-constraints on television prevent any lavish productions, either bought-in or produced in Hong Kong.

The material generated by Hong Kong film producers falls overwhelmingly into the loose genre of the *wu xia pian*, the 'martial chivalry film' that includes the swordplay film and its sub-genre the *kung fu* film. Some younger directors are beginning to seek ways of dealing directly with contemporary Hong Kong rather than with a mythologised history of China, and this represents a new initiative in Hong Kong film-making. Film-making in Hong Kong depends for its profitability on exports to Taiwan and to the large but scattered Chinese communities around the world. Commercial success in Hong Kong can

return the film's initial costs, but no more. Hong Kong production was dominated by the Shaw Brothers enterprise in the early 1970s, who spearheaded the Bruce Lee *kung fu* export drive of that time. Nowadays Shaw's studio is on the verge of closing, and the largest single production/exhibition combine is Golden Harvest. Production by independent producers has increased.

The Hong Kong International Film Festival has done valuable work in excavating and studying the history of Hong Kong cinema. The Spring 1981 Festival, with which our visit coincided, included a season of some 35 of the estimated 800 *wu xia pian* produced in Hong Kong since the war. This season, assembled by Lau Shing-hon, included a few of the most influential Taiwanese productions, notably King Hu's work from the late 1960s. Last year, a selection of the 200 or so *kung fu* films was shown. Each event has been accompanied by an important book of essays and filmography: this year's, edited by Leong Mo-ling, 'includes a historical survey of the Cantonese martial arts cinema, discussions on the evolution of the hero-image in films and literature, as well as criticism based on philosophy, the poetic modes of *fu*, *bi*, *xing*, semiotics and the writings of Jacques Lacan'.¹ This work traces a genre of swordplay films to an origin in the anti-Confucian, May the Fourth movement in literature; works from description and memories of films of the 1920s that use this material, mostly from Shanghai; indicates the numerous historic

1 A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film (1945-1980), ed Leong Mo Ling, the 5th Hong Kong International Film Festival, Urban Council, Hong Kong, 1981.

transformations undergone in the elaboration of the genre; then questions the whole generic designation as either too general to be useful, or based merely upon surface features: a long distance to travel in an initial work of discovery. This book and the surrounding work is the most enduring work of the Festival, the first time that serious critical attention has been paid to the whole extent of this mass cinema's most distinctive genre.

2 WU XIA PIAN

Swordplay films arrived in the West in the early 1970s, in the wake of Bruce Lee and *kung fu*. The authors first encounter with them was in Birmingham's popular cinema: suddenly there appeared this popular cinema that provided a startlingly wide range of roles for women (Hollywood was in a buddy-movie phase then), and constructed films on a basis that was unfamiliar. It was a cinema of difference, exotic and vaguely indecipherable, full of gnomic encounters and violence that was ritualised according to fantasies of wish-fulfilment. This impression of difference, or distance, was intensified by the process of dubbing and, it soon became clear, by the amount of 'violence' deleted by the British censors. Allegedly realistic violence was permissible at this point, but not the blatant hyperbole and delicate physical skill of these films (it was the time of the *Straw Dogs*/*A Clockwork Orange* controversy²). Under such constraints, *kung fu* and swordplay films did not maintain their presence in British circuit cinemas; instead they

retreated to late-night 'uncensored martial arts' programmes for a basically West Indian audience, and a few cinemas serving the Chinese community in major cities.

From the screenings at the Hong Kong Festival, it appears that the 'violence' that so exercised the British censor in the early 1970s was nothing other than a calculated borrowing from the western, specifically from Peckinpah. Graphic dismemberment is not a necessary feature of the genre, but one feature that surfaces in specific conditions. The swordplay film contains numerous examples of minimal violence used to maximum effect, emphasising the supreme skill of the protagonist. Disarranging an opponent's hair or slicing a belt are major events in some fights: their effect coming from the degree of calculation and refusal to wound, the intimidation of the opponent by demonstrating a mastery held in reserve.

For the swordplay film, in those examples we saw, is centrally about the perfection of skills and the complex moral dilemmas involved in their deployment. In this, the three major strands of traditional Chinese philosophy are combined to varying degrees. Confucian teaching emphasises the patriarchal loyalties to father, teacher and clan, yet (for men only) it promotes notions of personal competitiveness and a desire for immortality through fame. Hence at once the common plot device of revenge for the murder of a father or teacher, the sudden appearance of rival clans, and the quest for the accolade of Supreme Swordsman. Buddhism teaches notions of personal perfection and the lack of worldly ambition in the service of a higher ideal: still, that is, as a part of proving a loyalty to a further patriarchal ideal.

2 See 'Straw Dogs, A Clockwork Orange and the Critics', Charles Barr, *Screen*, vol 13 no 2, Summer 1972.

94 Ultimate skill and wisdom is seen as the product of great age, explaining the frequent appearance of senile (white-haired) men capable of amazing feats (as in King Hu's *Dragon Gate Inn*, 1967). Buddhism values compassion, even to enemies, the object of a fight being to make the opponent live through the kind of suffering to which the protagonist has been subjected. Taoist philosophy emphasises freedom and frugality, valuing nature and equating the artificial and man-made with evil. Hence another of King Hu's characters, the eccentric Fan Daibei (*Come Drink With Me*, 1966), a consummate swordsman with a drink problem, living in a secret world so unnatural that it has to be constructed in a studio. For Taoism, weakness and vulnerability often disguise great strength and skill, as in *The Deaf and Mute Heroine* (1971). Posed as abstractions or oppositions (Nature v Culture; Authority v Anarchy etc), these notions have a deceptive air of familiarity. The real difficulty for us faced with the swordplay film was the unexpected combination and modulation of these notions. The narratives often seem to offer a trite problematic, yet it develops in unexpected ways, like the web of dupliciousness and contradictory motivations that confront the hero of *The Enigmatic Case* (1980).

The form of the narratives themselves is frequently at variance with American and European forms. There is a tendency for films to be held together by their themes rather than by the central characters. It is a frequent device that protagonists encounter a series of enemies (or tests) rather than engaging in a conflict whose characters and terms are made clear from the initial disruption. Evil is exposed progressively, like a series of Russian dolls. Some films even

proceed by a series of displacements of the central protagonists. King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1969) begins with the timid artist Ku Sheng-Chai (who turns out to be an expert strategist), moves to concentrate on the mysterious swordswoman Yang Hui-Chen, and finally centres on her master the monk Hui Yuan.

This freedom of narrative structure seems unusual for a popular genre: it certainly allows a certain degree of freedom in the portrayal of women that the genre closest to it, the Western, cannot permit. This is in contradiction to Confucian ideas of female inferiority. Women are not relegated to domestic life, which anyway is radically absent from most swordplay films (*A Touch of Zen* being unusual in its delineation of the everyday). Instead, they appear as dramatic protagonists, bent on revenge like their male counterparts. Often, women are 'mistaken' in the fiction (though not for the audience) as men: they fight alongside men, and die with them. Yet a final position of authority is reserved for men; we did not see, nor were we told of, a single film in which the ultimate mastery of the art of the sword is held by a woman. However, the films do not involve the punishment of active women, nor their return to domestic and familial confinement, as do the genres of classic Hollywood.

Perhaps it is this consideration, along with the routine narrative device of familial revenge, that prompts Roger Garcia to examine the films, and their limitations, in terms of family melodrama:

There are at least two familial structures in a swordplay film . . . there is the family of normal social relationships, and the family hierarchy of the martial

arts world where different fighters are ranked in order of superiority . . . The martial arts world is essentially anti-natural . . . In each swordplay film we have the protagonist whose concept of the self, of his projection on to the scene before him, is governed by his imagined control over the event. He is unable to grasp the world in any way other than something which he can arrange, and re-arrange according to his desire.

The problem of the swordplay film occurs, however, when the Anti-Natural Family structure penetrates that of the Natural, and the subjects of mortality and death become all too apparent. In *The Sentimental Swordsman*, the deaths of Shih-yin and the manservant Chuan-chia, the two nodal points of the Natural Family, place this contact into crisis because they function as moments of recognition where the mistaken concept of control becomes apparent. Both Family structures at this stage become threatened; the resilience of the Natural Family appears vulnerable, while the potency of the martial arts Family seems lost. The problem with the swordplay film is that such a crisis is resolved by the arbitrary . . . [by] a recuperation motivated by fear and guilt to have realised such a thing (op cit pp 194-5).

Certainly, swordplay films are eminently amenable to psychoanalytic interpretations, with their familial concerns, their play with the edges of patriarchal culture and the possibilities thus offered to women, and the blatant wish-fulfillment of the feats of physical skill. Yet a view of history can be developed. Often, particularly in the films of King Hu, appeal is made to a historical alibi for the narrative. Even so, what

appears is a China of day-dream: a world where the same milieux constantly recur (often because they are the same sets): the drinking house, the palace with its courtyards and verandas, the narrow streets, the peasant hovels, the dramatic landscapes. It is a China which forgets the twentieth century, returning to feudal relations in which (paradoxically) a crucial role is allotted to individual acts against corruption within the system. The cost to the films of this nostalgia is unexpected. The films do great damage to the 'national heritage' that the non-Communist Chinese like to think they maintain. They have the opposite attitude to physical violence to Peking Opera (or to the Cantonese opera performances seen in Ann Hui's *The Spooky Bunch* (1980)). In the traditional operas, the actors never made physical contact during their combats. The emphasis is on complex feats of juggling, using, in the case of the Peking Opera, objects that could have no conceivable role in a real fight. Swordplay films rely on dramas of physical contact, of the exchange of blows which are parried or suffered. This is a profound difference from the tradition since the depiction of physical injury has a different relationship to the spectator: it mobilises all the sado-masochistic anxieties attendant on scenes of physical dismemberment.

A historical view of the swordplay film also distinguishes the way in which the films draw on many genres of popular cinema. There is a strong debt to the Japanese, to Samurai films and to the 'monster' films of the 1960s. Another strong influence is the 'spaghetti Western' which has encouraged the swordplay films' penchant for the motif of the solitary enigmatic hero and for a creative concentration on *mise-*

96 *en-scène*. This points to the ease and speed with which Hong Kong and Taiwan film-makers are able to adapt to changing conditions in their domestic markets. On the other hand, a conservatism is detected, which critics attribute to producers who are unwilling to experiment because of their infamously tight production schedules and low wages. A certain impasse in the genre is currently laid at the door of major producers like Shaw Brothers.

Two strategies have been adopted to counter this perceived conservatism. The first is that of the influential King Hu, who constructs himself as an authorial figure, and backs this up with shrewd production decisions. The authorial 'King Hu' has enabled his films to be marketed in the West as subtitled films on the art cinema circuit, rather than as dubbed entertainment. The authorial marks of 'King Hu' include a calculated reinjection of operatic traditions, a complexity of philosophical debate, an obsession with the Ming dynasty, and a particular skill in the staging of spectacular set-piece fights.

The second strategy is that of the so-called Hong Kong New Wave. It is a calculated rejection of the tradition of making a career by working in the limits of popular cinema. Film-makers like Ann Hui and Allen Fong, trained abroad, make films about contemporary subjects. Fong's first film, *Father and Son* (1981) was to have opened the Festival, but the Urban Council that mounts the event forced its withdrawal because it was made by a 'left-wing' company, funded by mainland China. Ann Hui's *The Spooky Bunch* (1980) is a spoof ghost story, about a Cantonese opera troupe. It gleefully puns on most of the major concerns of the swordplay film, as well as American cinema's staple theme of

demonic possession. Since this, Hui has made *The Story of Wu Viet* (1981), about a refugee from Vietnam who winds up as a hit-man in Manila, and she is now developing a major production for a 'left-wing' company, to be shot in mainland China. As a result, Taiwan is refusing to release both her earlier films. Similarly, Allen Fong will be blacklisted in Taiwan, even though some critics judged his film as having 'no political overtones whatsoever'. Though these films are funded from the mainland, there is no sense in which they are intended to be shown there. The distance between the two cinemas is vast, the product of thirty years' separate development.

3 CHINA: REPRESENTATION AND CINEMA

The distance between Hong Kong and China can perhaps be measured by what is considered representable in each culture. Hong Kong is permeated by advertising, like a Western city. It is dominated by writing: signs of all descriptions festoon city buildings and stretch across the street. The Chinese cities we visited (including 'sophisticated' Shanghai) treated sign writing functionally, to indicate a locale or slogan that needed indicating; advertising had begun to appear, but tentatively. In cinema, too, the same contrast appears. Hong Kong cinema has developed a strong tradition of depictions of violence, involving its own system of performances and special effects, its own codes and conventions. The Chinese film-makers we met in Shanghai were assessing their first foray into the explicit depiction of familial violence: a scene in *Family Festivities* (1980) in which a husband slaps his wife who has been intriguing to break up the extended family group into a series of independent nuclear

households. Such a level of aggression is new in Chinese cinema, and the scene was shot so as not to emphasise the physicality of the moment of husband striking wife. However, it is dangerous to treat such comparisons as emblematic of general features of a society. All that we can do is to record certain impressions.

We saw a China beginning to construct a new political line, that of the Four Modernisations, which includes the principles of learning from Japan and the West, and of re-introducing material incentives and luxury consumer goods. The ideological line being launched seemed to be one of denigrating large parts of the history of post-Revolutionary China as mistakes, and of emphasising China's 'backwardness' in relation to other cultures. This seems a dangerous process, courting a widespread political disillusion. It also seemed that 'Modernisation' was close to 'Westernisation', a contention strenuously denied by those we spoke to, who emphasised the durability of China's cultural traditions.

We paid a brief visit to the Shanghai Film Studios, which again emphasised the immense distance between the two cultures. The major concerns of the studio seemed to be those of the efficient use of resources; the problems in making ideologically effective films; the development of television and the relationship that cinema should have to it. We had come with questions (primed by friends in Hong Kong), but scarcely had time to ask them. We were overwhelmed by our host's thirst for knowledge about Western cinema. The fall of the gang of four has meant a reintroduction of Western films into China on a cautious and cash-conscious basis. Just before our arrival, the

greatest successes had been Wise's *The Sound of Music* (1965), which a Lukacsian-derived thematic analysis had discovered was an anti-fascist film, and David Lean's two adaptations of Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948). This selective discovery of Western cinema by China's mass audience does not seem to have enabled the personnel of the Shanghai Studio to have made a wider exploration of foreign films. There seemed to be no scheme of importing films for study within the film industry alone. Hence they had seen no films from European art cinema since the time of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959): no Godard, no Antonioni apart from his condemned film on China, no Fassbinder. Hence much of our time was taken in trying to explain the Western phenomenon of the fragmentation of mass cinema in the face of competition from television; the emergence of formal challenges to the dominance of Hollywood textual forms; the increasing division of the art cinema market itself into a conservative humanistic content-based aesthetic (served by Truffaut for example), and a tendency concerned with reading images and sound rather than treating them as an aestheticised imprint of an impossible real.

We did however gain a certain sense of the current organisation of feature film production at the Shanghai Studios, and the current points of stress. The studio has a permanent salaried staff that includes 70 to 80 directors and assistant directors and a troupe of actors. There is consequently a problem of underemployment of many of the studio's personnel, which it is proposed to solve by undertaking the production of material for television, which in China is exclusively produced on videotape. The development of television will

98 exacerbate the major problem of the current feature film production methods at the studio: the slow speed at which films move from conception to completion. A clear distinction was made between television production (with an immediacy of response to social issues) and cinema production (demanding a more reflective, and hence ideologically more risky, approach). The ideological risks involved in film production have traditionally meant that films spend a long time in the script stage: an absolute minimum of three months, usually at least six, and sometimes a matter of a year or years. Themes are not generally set in advance by agencies outside the industry. Presumably the political calculation of those involved in the process is adequate. Our hosts indicated that there was a certain problem of over-production on certain themes, like the recent rash of films on China's relationship with Taiwan.

Once an idea has been approved, it is drafted and re-drafted in the extensive script department, and once a final script has been approved by the studio hierarchy (in which the Communist Party is of course heavily represented), the actual production of a film can be a swift affair. A typical production schedule is that six weeks preparation follows the approval of the final script, with one to two months' shooting time and another month post-production. Post-production time is reduced by undertaking as much editing and dubbing as possible whilst shooting is still underway. *Mise-en-scène* is very much subjugated to the importance of the script, and script tends to be thought in Lukacsian terms: the problem is one of finding a fictional form that presents the typical, that diagnoses social contradictions. The basic conception of

how to make films still seems to be that worked out in post-Revolutionary USSR.

Within this process, several changes have been made recently. The first is to reverse the trend of the Cultural Revolution period, which was to base film production entirely on post-synchronisation, and to reduce location work. Though synch shooting is still comparatively rare, location work (with portable Arriflexes) has returned to the pre-Cultural Revolution proportion of being about half of the studio's work. Hence on the Saturday that we visited, neither stage was in use, though shooting on one (a Peking Opera) had ended the previous day. Another major innovation is that of developing group or unit production methods. Five groups have been set up, comprising producers, director and writers (and, potentially, art directors and camera-operators). These will have a high degree of autonomy and ability to generate their own projects as well as having projects assigned to them in the usual manner. This is a response to a certain problem in the style of films produced, as well as to that of the underemployment of personnel and the slowness of the script stage. Such groups are expected to be a little more adventurous; though the directions that this experimentation will take seem much determined by the foreign models that are available. We were eagerly questioned about the 'realism' of American acting.

Another major innovation, part of a general trend in Chinese society, is the introduction of the calculation of profitability on a film-by-film basis, and with it of a level of material incentive to the personnel. Until recently, the studio has sold the rights in its films at a flat rate, guaranteeing a comfortable return even if the film failed at the box-office.

Notice was taken of the popularity of films, as a guide to their effectivity, but the system is now being changed. Currently, negotiations are taking place to link the studio's income from a film to the box-office success of a film. This enables (and justifies) the re-introduction of material incentives in the form of bonuses to those involved in a successful production. The level of these bonuses, however, will not produce huge disparities between earnings for equivalent grades.

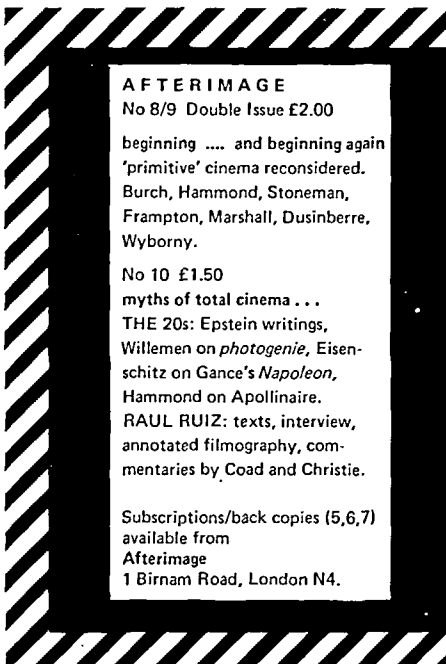
China is a society in transition, and film, with its massive capital investment in ideological work, is in many ways a crucial indicator of the extent of changes. Shanghai Studios indicated these changes to some extent; the viewing (in the Hong Kong Festival) of a comedy from 1979 *Look, What a Family!* provided another optic. It is a factory comedy, close in style to a Hollywood comedy of the 1930s like *My Man Godfrey* (1936). It has the complex plot and sharp juxtapositions of characters that comes from close scripting, but most bizarre (especially for a film directed by a woman, Wang Haowei) is its use of women. The film's issue is that of factory improvement, and it is centred in a textile factory: women are made crucial to the film as consumers as well as workers, where men are only workers. Women consume textiles, demanding better quality and a wider range of goods. In relation to the urban China we saw, the clothes worn by the women in the film (each seemed to have numerous print dresses) were presented as models; the men's were ordinary, conforming to a verisimilitudinous accuracy of depiction. All of this takes place in the context of an optimism about the programme of Four Modernisations that has evaporated by 1981. The attitude towards women in this film was reflected in the

advertisement hoardings that are beginning to appear. Having no tradition of advertising, the calculations made in the images may well lack subtlety, but the conception of women as consumers of commodities is crucial. Here too, the depictions of women are startlingly at variance with the women seen on the street. This process is a reinstatement of inequality between the sexes within representations. The films we have seen from the period of the Cultural Revolution tend to portray women as equals to men, in the sense that they are not particularly endowed with a special status simply by the fact that they are women. Taking women as the target for consumerist blandishments immediately returns women to that special status: and it is inevitably an inferior status. In *Look, What a Family!* women are concerned with romance to a greater extent than men; they neglect their work more than men; they follow where men lead. In *Intimate Relations* (no credits available), a recent film we saw on the theme of China-Taiwan relations, the main juvenile characters were brought together by shipwreck on a desert island. He, the Communist, was able to find food, fire and shelter; she, the 'decadent Taiwanese', was helpless. The return to the use of such typing on the grounds of sex seems to be a general feature of Chinese representations, and seem to coincide (at the least) with the calculated re-introduction of material incentives.

The problem of the representation of women re-emerging in China seems directly related to the introduction of Japanese and Western models of 'progress' and of material incentives. The major problem is that these models seem to have been adopted without real knowledge of the competing tendencies

100 within these societies. Just as we can speak of 'China' to designate a society conceived as monolithic, without internal conflict, so too can the Chinese uncritically adopt forms from the West which are extensively criticised and challenged in the West. This is as true in cinema as it is elsewhere. The narrow range of models available for feature film production may produce a turn in Chinese cinema that depends too heavily on American commercial models, and underestimates other cultural forms. In particular, it may lead to a fetishism of the conception of American cinema as

'realistic' without adequate realisation of the importance of China's own traditions of acting and representation. Here, the Hong Kong International Film Festival has a crucial role to play as a point of cultural exchange between Chinese film-makers and the West. It would be less one-side than the exchange of technology and skills between the West and China, because it would be crucial to the future development of Hong Kong's cinema. However, the timidity of the festival's sponsors, the Urban Council, may well make it impossible. That would be tragic for both sides.

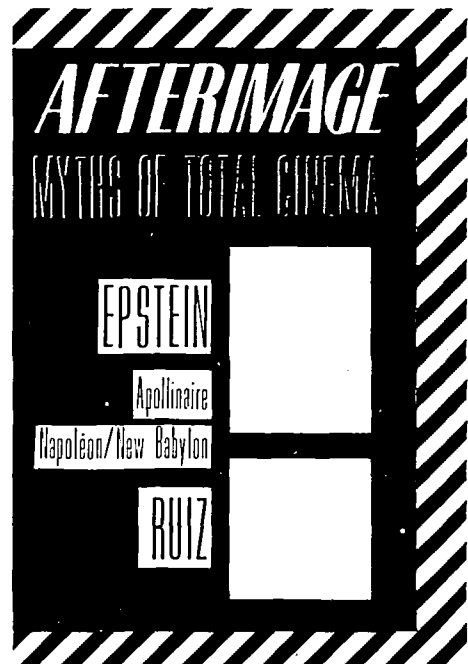


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